The WHITE WATER-FALL

By James Francis Dwyer

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THE WHITE WATERFALL

"'Hold me tight, Verslun!' he cried. 'Hold me tight, man! I *have him!*'"

THE WHITE WATERFALL

BY

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES S. CHAPMAN

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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TO

L. C. D. and G. M. D.

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"THAT'S THE WAY TO HEAVEN,
THAT'S THE WAY TO HEAVEN,
THAT'S THE WAY TO HEAVEN OUT
OF BLACK FERNANDO'S HELL."

PREFACE

It is perhaps inadvisable to mix fact with fiction, but, it appears, some reference to certain portions of "The White Waterfall" that might strain the belief of the average reader will not be out of place. In the wonderful islands of the Pacific many things happen that seem improbable to the minds of those who dwell close to the heart of civilization. The mysterious Isle of Tears is not altogether a dream. There are several islands in Polynesia that have been looked upon from time immemorial as islands of the dead. These places are shunned by the islanders, and the centuries have invested them with the same atmosphere of brooding mystery that Professor Herndon and his party felt when they landed upon the silent isle where the Wizards of the Centipede performed their weird rites without interference from the outside world.

Nor is the Vermilion Pit created out of thin air. The savage has used many startling methods to separate the born warrior from the coward, and the author has seen a place just as wonderful as the pit, where the young men of the tribe were tested

in the same manner as that related in this story. The cunning savage has always thought it inadvisable to pick his fighting men till their courage had been thoroughly tested, and in dull days of peace the headmen of the tribes racked their brains to discover nerve-shaking ordeals to try the daring of the growing youth. The safety of the tribe depended upon the valour of the fighting line, and it would have been an inexcusable blunder to put the nervous ones in the front rank.

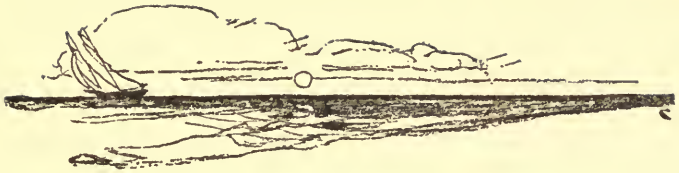
The strange stone structures similar to the one upon which Holman and Verslun narrowly escaped being offered up as sacrifices to the Centipede are to be found in many islands of the Pacific at the present day. In the Tongan, Caroline, and Cook groups these peculiar stone ruins remain as evidence of the existence of an ancient people of superior intelligence to the islanders of to-day. As to the meaning or use of these structures we are entirely in the dark. The natives of these groups know nothing concerning them, and the Polynesian builder in that dark past was too busy clubbing and eating his neighbour to write histories. Scientists are in doubt, as in the case of the great ruins at Metalanim, whether they were built as sacrificial altars or as monuments to ambitious chiefs, and there are no records to enlighten us. But these relics are convincing proofs that the islands have been

inhabited for many hundreds of years, and we are left to conjecture regarding the origin and history of the people.

The Dance of the Centipede, which Holman and Verslun witnessed in the Long Gallery, can be seen to-day by any tourist who leaves the beaten paths. Every missionary to the islands can tell of "devil dances" that take place in secluded groves, and in which, to his great disgust, his converts often take part. It takes time to turn the savage from his old beliefs. Although the South Seas constitute the last fortress of romance, and a mention of the coral atolls immediately conjures up a vision of palms and rice-white beaches, the sensitive person senses the dark and bloody past when the wizard men were the rulers, and death stalked in the palm groves.

J. F. D.

New York,
March, 1912.



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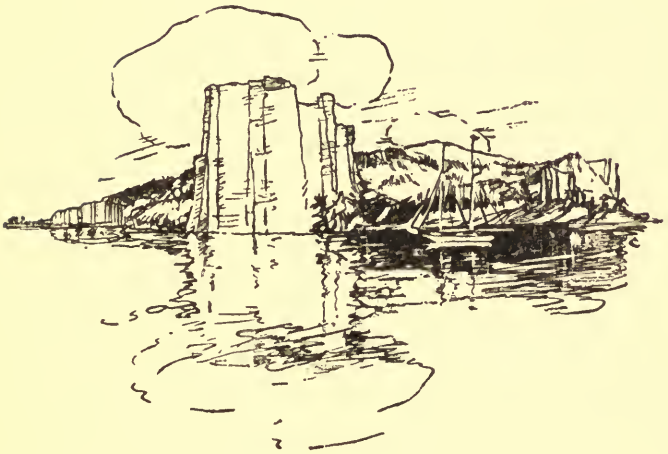


CHAPTER I

THE SONG OF THE MAORI

THERE is a Tongan proverb which tells us that only fools and children lie awake during hours that could be devoted to slumber, and it is a wise proverb when you judge it from a Polynesian standpoint. No special preparations are required for slumber in the last haunts of Romance, and as one does not lose caste by dozing in public, the South Sea dweller sees no reason for remaining awake when he could be peacefully sleeping. The shade of a palm tree furnishes an ideal resting place, and if a dog fight occurs in the grass-grown street, he becomes a box-seat spectator without moving from his couch.

Levuka, the second largest town in the Fijis, was dozing on the afternoon of December 14, 1905, and I decided to follow the example set by the inhabitants. The thermometer in the shack at the end of the wharf registered 98 degrees, but the picturesque little town, with its white and vermilion-tinted houses, looked restful and cool. The hot, still atmosphere weighed down upon the Pacific, ironing out the wind ruffles till the ocean resembled a plain of glass, in which the Union Company's steamer *Navua*, from Auckland, appeared to be stuck fast, as if the glassy sea had suddenly hardened around her black hull.

A thin strip of shadow huddled close to a pile of pearl shell at the end of the wharf, and I doubled myself up and attempted to sleep. But hardwood planks don't make an ideal resting place. Besides, the rays of sun followed the strip of shadow around the pile, and each time I slipped into a doze I would be pricked into wakefulness. At last, maddened by the biting rays, I collected half a dozen copra bags, splintered a piece of *kauri* pine, and after rigging up one bag as an awning, I spread the others on the planks and fell asleep.

But another disturbing element awakened me from a short slumber. From the sea end of the deserted wharf came a big, greasy Maori and a fuzzy-headed Fijian, and their words went out into the

silence like sound projectiles. The Maori had such a high-pitched voice that I thought, as I rolled over restlessly, he would only have to raise it a little to make them hear him up in Sydney, eighteen hundred miles away. It was one of those voices that fairly cavort over big distances, and I buried my head in the shell as the pair came closer.

It was useless to attempt to shut out that voice. I stuffed a piece of bag into the ear that wasn't jammed against the pearl shell, but the noise of that fool talking fairly sizzled in my brain. Finally I gave up all hopes of trying to sleep till the pair had left the wharf, and I lay upon my back as they came slowly up the sun-bitten structure.

It was only when I gave up all thoughts of sleep that I recognized that the Maori was talking English. Up to that moment I thought the pair were arguing in some unfamiliar tongue, but suddenly their conversation gripped me, and I strained my ears to listen.

"There's the white waterfall," chanted the Maori.

"Yes, the white waterfall," repeated the Fijian.

"An' you go along sixty paces."

"To the right?" questioned the Fijian.

"No! To the left, you fool!" screamed his companion.

"All right, you go to the left," muttered the rebuked one.

"An' that's the way to heaven!" cried the Maori.

"The way to heaven," echoed the Fijian; then the two lifted up their voices and chanted:

"That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven out
Of Black Fernando's hell."

The incident stirred my curiosity. If I had only heard the words of the chant I would not have puzzled my brain to determine their meaning, but it was the manner in which the Maori instructed his friend as to the direction in which one must walk from the white waterfall that made me interested. I turned the words over in my mind as I watched them saunter slowly toward me. Black Fernando's hell and the white waterfall were places that I had never heard of. I thought of all the missionary hymns that I had ever listened to afloat and ashore, but the lines that the pair had chanted were not familiar.

The two walked on in silence for a few minutes after they had lifted up their voices in the chant, then the Maori began to cross-question his companion concerning the information he had just given him.

"How many paces?" he asked.

"Sixty," answered the Fijian.

"To the right, isn't it?"

"Yes, to the right," stammered the learner.

"You fool nigger!" screamed the instructor. "It is to the left, pig! Do you hear me? You must go to the left from the white waterfall! Oh, you blinded fool! you make me sick! Sing it now with me!"

The Fijian, who was apparently afraid of the bully, hurried to obey the order, and I wondered as I listened.

"Sixty paces to the left," squeaked the Fijian.

"Sixty paces to the left," roared the Maori. "Now together!

"That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven out
Of ——"

I was the cause of the interruption. I lifted myself into a sitting position, and the movement disturbed the heap of shell. Part of the pile rattled down upon the planks of the wharf, and the Maori and his pupil stopped singing and stared at me as if they were much surprised at finding any one within hearing distance. The wharf had appeared deserted, and I gave them a start by crawling from underneath the awning I had made from the copra bag. The Maori wore a dirty khaki coat, with a pair of trousers reaching to his knees, while the Fijian, instead of being short-rigged in shirt and sulu, sported a full suit of duck.

"Good afternoon, boss," said the Maori, trying to wipe the look of surprise from his face with a grin. "Mighty hot afternoon, isn't it, boss?"

"It is," I answered. "If I knew where that white waterfall is I'd go and stand under it for a few minutes."

The small Fijian gave a little gurgle of surprise and looked up at his big teacher, who regarded me with eyes of wonder.

"What white waterfall, boss?" he asked blandly.

"The one you were singing about," I cried.

The Maori smiled sweetly. "We weren't singing about a white waterfall, boss," he spluttered. "I just guess you were asleep an' dreamed something."

That didn't improve my temper. I had an edge on the fellow on account of the high-powered voice he owned, so when he suggested that I had been dreaming, I climbed to my feet so that I could make my words more impressive when I started to tell him my opinion of his bluff.

The action startled the Fijian. He had an idea that I was going to use the piece of *kauri* pine upon his head, so he gave a yell and started full speed up the wharf toward the town. The Maori stood his ground for a minute, then he made a face to express his contempt for me and bolted after his mate. I stared at his bare legs walloping the planks, and

feeling certain that I had lost all chance of finding out where the white waterfall and Black Fernando's hell were situated, I found a new shadow patch and lay down again.

I fell asleep and dreamed that I was chasing those two islanders in an endeavour to find out the meaning of their mysterious chant, but just as I had overtaken the pair, some one gripped my arm and shook me gently.

When I opened my eyes I looked up into the face of a good-looking young fellow of about two and twenty years, who was smiling broadly as if he thought it a great joke to wake a man out of a sound sleep on a hot afternoon.

"Are you Jack Verslun?" he asked.

I nodded. It was too warm to use words recklessly.

"Pierre the Rat sent me after you," he continued.

"Why?" I asked.

"I have a berth for you," he answered. "I'm from *The Waif*. The mate died on the run down from Sydney, and Captain Newmarch sent me ashore to hunt up some one for his perch. Do you want it?"

"Where are you bound?" I asked.

"Manihiki group."

"What for?"

"Science expedition under the direction of Professor Herndon of San Francisco."

I sat up and looked across the stretch of water at *The Waif*, and the young fellow waited patiently. I knew the yacht. An English baronet had brought the vessel out from Cowes to Brisbane, but he had made the pace too hot in the Colonies. Out in Fortitude Valley one night the keeper of a saloon fired a bullet into his aristocratic head, and *The Waif* was auctioned. She had taken a hand in a number of games after that. A fast yacht is a handy vessel south of the line, and some queer tales were told about the boat that had once shown her heels to the crackerjacks in the Solent. But I couldn't afford to be particular at that moment. Levuka isn't the spot where a man can pick and choose, so I wiped the shell grit from my drill suit and told myself that I had better accept the berth instead of waiting in expectation of something better turning up. Pierre the Rat, who ran "The Rathole," where penniless seamen and beachcombers lodged, was my creditor, and when Pierre was very solicitous in obtaining employment for one of his boarders, it was a mighty good intimation that the boarder's credit had reached highwater mark.

"Well," I said, climbing to my feet, "I might as well take it. I thought I had enough of the Islands, but as this has turned up I'm your man. Say," I added, "did you ever read 'Pilgrim's Progress'?"

The young fellow looked at me and grinned. "Yes, I did," he answered.

"Do you remember much of it?" I asked.

"Not much," he replied.

"Is there anything in it about a white waterfall that is on the way to heaven out of Black Fernando's hell?" I questioned.

The youngster put his head on one side and looked as if he was turning things over in his mental storehouse, then he gave me a quick, shrewd glance and burst out laughing.

"Well?" I growled. "What's the grin for?"

"What has Bunyan got to do with my business?" he asked. "I came to sign you up for a mate's job on *The Waif*, and I am in a hurry."

"Yes, I know," I grumbled, "but I thought you might have heard something of a white waterfall. I'm not sure that it is mentioned in 'Pilgrim's Progress,' but it seems to taste of Bunyan."

"P'raps so," said the youngster, "but Bunyan isn't in our line at present. Captain Newmarch told me to hurry back to the yacht, as he wants to get away by sunset, so if you're ready we'll make a start. My name is Holman, Will Holman."

We walked up the quiet street together and I began to like Will Holman. One couldn't help but like him. He had the frank, open ways of a boy, but the cut of his jaw and the manner in which

he minted his words led you to believe that he would give a man's account of himself if any one pushed him up against a wall. While he made some purchases in the little stores, I went up to the broken-down shanty where Pierre the Rat ran his house of refuge, and, after I had collected my few belongings, I went back to the wharf, where a boat from *The Waif* was waiting to take us aboard the yacht.

It was when I was climbing into the boat that I got a surprise. One of the two natives at the oars was the little Fijian who had been the pupil of the Maori, but he didn't bat an eyelash when I stared at him.

"What's up?" asked Holman. "Do you know Toni?"

"He's one of the brace that were singing that song about the white waterfall," I growled.

The Fijian let out a volley of indignant denials, and Holman laughed.

"You might be mistaken," he said. "Toni came ashore with me about two hours ago, but I don't think he left the boat."

"I'm not mistaken," I said, as the Fijian kept on protesting that he had never moved from the boat, "but it doesn't matter much. Let it go."

We were about a quarter of a mile from the shore when a man raced down from the town, ran along

to the sea end of the wharf and waved his arms as if he was signalling us. Holman turned and looked at him.

"I wonder who it is?" he muttered. "Perhaps it is somebody with your board bill, Verslun."

I started to laugh, then I stopped suddenly. The man on the wharf was shouting to us, and when my ears caught a word I recognized him. It was the big Maori who had been instructing the Fijian earlier in the afternoon.

I told Holman, and he looked at Toni, but Toni's face was blank. For some reason or other he wished to ignore his instructor who was screaming on the end of the wharf.

"He must be mad," muttered Holman. "The darned fool thinks we —— Listen!"

A land breeze brought the last line of the chant to our ears as we neared *The Waif*, and the words seemed to stir me curiously as they swirled around us. I had a desire to memorize the chant, and even after we had got out of range of the high-powered voice of the singer I found myself murmuring over and over again the words:

"That's the way to heaven out
Of Black Fernando's hell."

CHAPTER II

THE PROFESSOR'S DAUGHTERS

IN THE old days, when slave-carrying was a game followed by gentlemen with nerve, the officer with the best nose on board the man-o'-war that overhauled a suspected slave carrier was always sent aboard to make an examination. It was his business to sniff at the air in the hold in an endeavour to distinguish the "slave smell." No matter how the wily slaver disinfected the place, the odour of caged niggers remained, and a long-nosed investigator could always detect it.

Now the trouble odour on board a ship is the same as the slave smell. An experienced investigator can

detect it immediately, and when I climbed over the low bulwarks of *The Waif* I got a whiff. I couldn't tell exactly where it was, but I knew that Dame Trouble was aboard the craft. It's a sort of sixth sense with a sailorman to be able to detect a stormy atmosphere, and I felt that the yacht wasn't the place that the dove of peace would choose as a permanent abode. I don't know how the information came to me. It seemed to filter in through the pores of my skin, but it was information that I felt sure was correct.

Captain Newmarch was a bilious Englishman with a thin, scrawny beard. He endeavoured to make one word do the work of two — or three if they were very short words — and working up a conversation with him was as tough a job as one could lay hold of. Sometimes a word came to the tip of his tongue, felt the atmosphere, as you might say, then slid back into his throat with a little protesting gurgle, and after a ten minutes' conversation with him, those little gurgles from the strangled words made me look upon him as a sort of morgue for murdered sentences.

Professor Herndon, the head of the expedition, was on the deck when the captain and I came up out of the cabin, and Herndon was everything the comic papers show in the make-up of science professors, with a little bit extra for good luck. He

was sixty inches of nerves, wrinkles, and whiskers, with special adornments in the shape of a blue smoking cap, and a pair of spectacles with specially ground lenses of an enormous thickness.

Newmarch grunted something which the Professor and I took to be an introduction, and he put a skinny hand into mine.

"You have been a long while in the Islands?" he squeaked.

"Longer than I care to say," I replied.

"Have you been around the spot we are making for?" he asked.

"I was on Penrhyn Island for three months," I answered. "I was helping a German scientist who was studying the family habits of turtles."

I made a foolish break by admitting that I possessed any knowledge of Polynesia. The Professor had left his home at sunny Sausalito, on the shores of San Francisco Bay, in search of that kind of stuff, and before I could do a conversational backstep he had pushed me against the side of the galley and was deluging me with questions, the answers to which he entered in shorthand in a notebook that was bulkier than a Dutchman's Bible. The old spectacled ancient could fire more queries in three minutes than any human gatling that ever gripped a brief, and I looked around for relief.

And the wonder is that the relief came. I for-

got the Professor and his anxiety concerning the "temba-temba" devil dance when my eyes happened to catch sight of the vision that was approaching from the companionway. A boat carrying a science expedition to one of the loneliest groups in the Pacific was not the place where one would expect to find the handsomest girl in all the world, and my tongue refused to mould my words. The girl was tall, of graceful build, and possessed of a quiet beauty that had a most peculiar effect upon me. Only that afternoon, as I lay in the shadow of the pile of pearl shell on Levuka wharf, I had thought of crossing to Auckland and shipping up to 'Frisco so that I could hear good women laugh and talk as I had heard them in my dreams during the years I had spent around the Islands, and now the woman of my dreams was in front of me. But I was afraid of her. When she came toward me I thought of the years I had wasted down in that lonely quarter where ambition is strangled by lassitude bred in tropical sunshine, and the ghost of the man I might have been banged me fair between the two eyes.

"My daughter, Miss Edith Herndon," squeaked the Professor, and when I put out my big hand to take her little one I thought I'd fall down on the deck on account of the Niagara of blood that seemed to rush to my brain.

It's funny how all the little imperfections in your

dress and manner rise up suddenly and bang you hard on the bump of observation when you find yourself in front of some one whose good opinion you want to earn. I felt it so the moment I stood before the girl in the cream serge suit. My drill outfit, that I had thought rather clean when I brushed the shell grit from it after my sleep on the wharf, looked as black as the devil's tail when she appeared. My hands appeared to be several degrees larger than the prize hams that come out of Kansas, and my tongue, as if it recognized the stupidity of the remarks I attempted to make, started to play fool stunts as if it wanted to go down my throat and choke me to death.

The girl guessed the sort of predicament I was in at that moment. God only knows how many months had passed since I had spoken to a woman like her. Not that good women are lacking in the Islands, but because they were on a different plane to me. I had been belting native crews on trading schooners between the Carolines and the Marquesas, and when ashore I had little opportunity for speaking to a woman of the type of Edith Herndon.

And she understood the feeling that held me tongue-tied. To make me feel at my ease she started to tell of everything that had happened from the moment that *The Waif* had cleared Sydney Heads, and the time she spent in that recital was as

precious to me as the two-minute interval between rounds is to a prize-fighter who has been knocked silly the moment before the round ends. I had shaken the dizziness out of my head when she finished, and I had obtained control over my tongue.

"You must tell us a lot about the South Seas," she cried. "You have been down here such a long time that you must have many interesting things to relate. Captain Newmarch will not talk, and Mr. Leith refuses to see anything picturesque in the sights he has seen during his wanderings."

"Who is Mr. Leith?" I asked.

"He is father's partner in this expedition," she said quietly. "He has lived down here for many years, but he will not tell us much. And Barbara is anxious to know everything she can."

"Barbara?" I stammered. "Then — then there is another lady aboard?"

"Oh, yes! my sister," cried the girl. "I think I hear her coming now."

There was no question about the latter part of her remark. A burst of laughter that was more infectious than influenza came from the companion-stairs, and immediately in its wake came a girl who made me think, as I compared her to Miss Edith, of a beautiful yacht alongside a stately liner. Barbara Herndon was sunshine personified. Laughter went with her wherever she went, and a pair of

Tongans, polishing brasses, immediately put their molars on view, as if they had understood what caused the smiles upon her pretty face as she came toward us.

"Oh, you are the new mate?" she cried, as I was introduced. "Mr. Holman was just telling me about you. He said that you repeated a chapter of 'Pilgrim's Progress' every time you woke up after a sleep."

I blushed as I made a mental resolve that I would punch the head of that youngster when I had a suitable opportunity, and in between my stammering explanations I made notes on the differences between the two girls. Edith was as stately as Juno, with a face that was so sweet and restful that a glance at it was better than an opiate for a man whose nerves were all out of tune. She had that kind of repose that you see sometimes on the face of an Oriental statue, the repose that comes to women who have met great trials or for whom great trials are waiting. Barbara was altogether different. She found the world rather an amusing place, and it seemed as if she took it for granted that her sister was capable of shouldering the cares of the family, leaving her free to smile at all the amusing incidents she found in the course of the day.

It appeared to me that I was an amusing incident to her at that moment. She returned to the fool

story that Holman had told, and I couldn't sidestep her questions.

"But it is true that you were quoting Bunyan on the wharf when Mr. Holman found you, isn't it?" she asked mischievously.

"No, it isn't true," I spluttered. "I only asked Mr. Holman a question to see if he was familiar with 'Pilgrim's Progress'."

"Why did you ask him that?" she quizzed. "I'm sure he looks a perfectly respectable young man."

Miss Edith was smiling, but she took pity upon me at last and endeavoured to rescue me from my tormentor.

"Oh, Barbara!" she cried reprovingly, "Mr. Verslun will think you are very inquisitive. You must not pry into his private affairs."

"But it is nothing private," I gurgled. "I simply asked Mr. Holman a question in an endeavour to find out what a Maori and a Fijian were talking about."

"Oh, it is something mysterious!" cried the younger girl. "I knew it! I knew it! We are getting into the region of mystery at last! Oh, Mr. Verslun, you are a perfect treasure! It has been a nasty, dull, old trip from the moment we left Sydney Harbour, and you are the first person to bring a little colour into the voyage."

She was so worked up at the thought of hearing something wonderfully mysterious and romantic that I started to make a long yarn out of that incident on the wharf just for her benefit. Miss Edith was interested too, but I was convinced, as I polished up the points of the little tale and endeavoured to pull in a thrill, that the elder sister was deriving her pleasure from watching the face of the younger one, and not from my story.

"It pleases Barbara," she cried, when I had told how Toni had denied all knowledge of his friend, and how the Maori had sent the farewell chant after the boat. "She thinks she will see and hear wonderful things before we get back to civilization."

"I hope she will," I said, and little did I dream that the wish I expressed at that moment should come true in such a remarkable manner before we had returned.

"And you don't know what they meant by their song about the white waterfall and Black Fernando's hell?" murmured Barbara.

"No, I don't," I replied. "The Maori ran away when I attempted to cross-examine him, and Toni denies all knowledge of the duet on the wharf."

"Oh, we must ask him again!" she cried. "There he is near the wheel. I'll go and bring him!"

She raced madly after the Fijian and hauled him before us in triumph. I was more convinced than

ever that it was Toni who had blundered over his lesson on the wharf, but Toni denied the charge more vehemently than he did on the boat. He asserted in reply to Barbara Herndon's questions, that he could not sing a note, that he was absolutely ignorant of white waterfalls, and the only hell he knew was the one spoken of by the missionary in Lower George Street, Sydney; and the girl sighed as she gave up the effort.

"It seemed such a nice mystery to unravel," she murmured, "but if Toni persists in saying that he knows nothing of the white waterfall the investigation falls to the ground."

The Fijian was backing away with renewed protestations when a head came round the corner of the galley, and a voice that was deeper than the caves of Atiu fired a question at us.

"What about the white waterfall?"

"Oh, Mr. Leith," cried Miss Barbara, "we have just been investigating a mystery. Mr. Verslun discovered it this afternoon in Levuka. But you haven't met Mr. Verslun yet, have you?"

"I haven't," growled the owner of the voice.

"Mr. Verslun, this is Mr. Leith, who is father's partner," said Miss Barbara. "He knows a lot about the Islands, but he refuses to tell any of his experiences."

I looked at the man who stood in front of me, and

a curious thing flashed through my mind. I was reminded at that moment of a story I had read of a man charged with an attempt upon the life of a prince. The would-be murderer informed the judge that a terrible hate of the princeling had gripped him the moment he put eyes on him, and he had made the attempt upon his life before he had managed to control the unexplainable surge of hate. I understood the emotion that had gripped that unfortunate as I stood face to face with Leith. A feeling of revulsion gripped me, and I experienced a peculiar squalmy sensation as I took his hand. It was unexplainable. Perhaps some ancestor of mine had unsatisfactory dealings with a man of the same unusual type in a faraway past, and the transmitted hate had suddenly sprung into the conscious area. I do know that you can keep a secretary-bird away from snakes till it grows old, but the first reptile it sees it immediately starts out to beat him up. I had the inherited hate that makes the secretary-bird rush madly at a snake that may be the first of its species that it has ever seen, and I guess that Leith had no love to spare for me from the moment he took my hand.

He was a huge brute, fully six feet tall, and he was the possessor of two of the strongest-looking hands I had ever seen. They were claws, that's

what they were. The great fingers were slightly crooked, as if waiting, like the tentacles of an octopus, for something to get in their grip. The body was heavy, and, in a manner that I cannot explain, it made me think of animals that lived and died in long past ages. The big brute looked so capable of making an inexcusable attack that one's primitive instincts warned one to keep in a state of readiness for the onslaught that seemed imminent.

But it was the face that was specially unattractive. It was a sallow, flat face, and the strange eyes did nothing to lighten it. They were dead, lustreless eyes. They had a coldness in them that reminded me of the icicle eyes of the crocodile, and, curiously, I associated that reptile's notions of fair warfare with Leith as I looked at him. That sullen face, with the eyes that would never brighten at a tale of daring, or dim from a story of pathos, belonged to a man who would imitate crocodile tactics by lying quiet till his prey was within striking distance.

"What is all this about the white waterfall?" he repeated, after the crooked fingers had dropped my hand.

"Oh, it's something that happened to Mr. Verslun," replied Miss Barbara.

"Where?" asked Leith.

"On the wharf over there," I answered coldly, nodding toward the structure as I spoke. "It's really nothing important though, and I related it solely for Miss Herndon's amusement."

"But Toni?" he growled, turning toward the two girls.

"Oh, Toni puts forward an alibi," laughed the youngest sister. "He asserts that he was in the boat when the incident happened and he persists in saying that he knows nothing about the matter."

Leith again turned toward me, and his brows straightened as he looked me in the eyes. "Can't you tell the story over again?" he asked.

"I'd rather not," I said, somewhat rudely. "I'm tired of it. It was really only a small happening that I am afraid I expanded a little in an endeavour to thrill Miss Herndon, and the story is now her personal property."

"But the bare facts?" he growled.

"There are no bare facts," I replied. "I covered them with fiction, and I think Miss Herndon is going to copyright the whole."

He took the remark as a direct refusal on my part to give him an outline of the affair to satisfy his curiosity, and I felt elated at noting the sudden glint of anger that appeared in the lustreless eyes.

The two girls stood silent for a moment while Leith and I surveyed each other without speaking, then a Tahitian boy broke the awkward silence by informing me that the captain wished to see me in the cabin, and I hurriedly excused myself to the sisters and went below.

CHAPTER III

A KNIFE FROM THE DARK

IT WAS after nine o'clock that evening before I again saw young Holman, and by that time Levuka was far behind. We had taken advantage of a stiff breeze that had sprung up about sunset, and *The Waif* was plunging through a moon-washed ocean, sending furrows of foam from her forefoot while the wind snored through her canvas. I forgot the happenings of the day as I felt the quivering vessel that seemed to thrill with the ecstasy of life as she flung herself at the watery wastes ahead. The tremor in her boards seemed to crawl into my body and warm me like wine, and I felt inclined to bless Holman instead of punching his head as I had thought of doing during

the baiting I received from Miss Barbara Herndon. The youngster had saved me from days and nights of weary monotony in sleepy Levuka, and I welcomed him gladly as he joined me on the poop.

"Say, you made a hit with the ladies!" he cried. "Your fame as a story-teller is set upon a solid foundation. And I don't suppose you are inclined to thank me for giving you the opportunity to tell of the wonderful things that happened while you slumbered on the wharf?"

"Drop it," I growled; "I've had enough of the joke. By the way, what position do you hold in the expedition?"

The boy laughed. "I hold none," he cried, "but I'm trying to make myself useful to the Professor so that he'll invite me to come ashore with him. The Professor and his daughters, with Leith and half a dozen natives, comprise the full strength of the expedition, and I'm trying hard for an invitation to the field of wonders."

"But what are you doing aboard?" I asked.

"My uncle owns *The Waif*," answered the young fellow, "and he thought this trip would be a nice cheap holiday for me. I wanted to take a run to the States, but that would have cost him money, so I allowed myself to be forced aboard the yacht. But, Gee! I'm mighty glad I came now."

I glanced at his face as we turned in our walk, but he moved his head away quickly.

"So it has been pleasant?" I said.

"Pleasant?" he cried. "Why it has been a little foretaste of heaven. Say, I like you, and I know you like her by the manner in which you explained everything to her. Don't you think she's a jolly nice girl?"

"Who?"

"Why, Miss Barbara Herndon," he cried.

"Oh!" I gurgled. "You took me by surprise, and I hardly knew — well, I didn't know what had made the trip so pleasant."

He put out his hand, and I gripped it warmly. There was something clean and good about the youngster. When he glanced up at me as I took his hand, I looked into a face that was as open as the day — a face that possessed all the passionate purity of youth, and my grip was sincere. One didn't ask for credentials in dealing with Will Holman.

"I liked you from the start," he said, "but I wanted the opinion of the girls. That's why I put Miss Barbara up to the game of firing questions at you about that silly business on the wharf."

"And did I pass muster?" I queried.

"Sure you did!" he cried enthusiastically. "Miss

Barbara Herndon says that you are true blue, and Miss Edith —— "

He stopped and looked at a patch of shadow near the galley. "Some one is hiding there," he whispered. "I saw him sneak into it."

"Nonsense!" I growled. "The moon and something else are affecting your brain."

"But I'm sure of it," he gasped.

He sprang for the spot as he finished speaking, but he found nothing. He returned to my side shaking his head as if only half convinced about the matter.

"Some one was listening to us talking, but whoever it was he managed to slip away while we were arguing the question."

"Well, he didn't learn much," I said. "It was probably one of the islanders, and you've scared the life out of him now."

Holman gripped my arm as I turned away, and he put a question in a tense whisper.

"What do you think of Leith?" he asked.

Somehow the question did not surprise me, but I was not in a hurry to give my opinion of the Professor's partner.

"I have only spoken a few words to him," I countered cautiously.

"But your impression?" stammered the youngster. "Don't you think — well, of course you haven't got the lay of things yet."

I smiled at the guilelessness of the boy who was making a confidant of a stranger. "What's wrong with Leith?" I asked. "What are you hinting at?"

Holman glanced at the Tongan at the wheel, then at the shadow patch that had disturbed his nerves a few moments before.

"He's the devil!" he whispered.

I felt inclined to laugh. Leith was certainly not a person that one would take to the moment an introduction was given, but the manner in which the young fellow had imparted his opinion was amusing. But it was evident that I had not guessed wrong when I divined trouble the moment I came over the side of the yacht.

Holman caught my coat with his left hand as we turned, and he spoke excitedly.

"Do you know what we're after?" he qucried hoarsely.

"It's a scientific expedition," I replied. "That's what you and Captain Newmarch told me, and I have not questioned any one else."

"But do you know the particular line we are after?"

"No," I replied.

"Well, we're after skulls. Leith has told the Professor about some ancient boneyard that he knows of, and he's dragging old Herndon down there."

"I cannot see the crime now," I said. "I've gone after skulls before to-day. I brought a hundred of them up to Vavau for a German scientist last year. He was taking them home to European museums to prove that the Polynesians of ten centuries back had bigger brains than the niggers of to-day."

"Yes, I know that," gurgled Holman; "but Leith — oh, damn it! I can't get you to understand! He pulled the Professor into this deal, and the old man is as green as grass. Herndon supplied the money and all that, and he's that much of a silly old doodlebug that this fellow is buncoing him out of his good gold."

"Yes," I muttered; "and what do his daughters say?"

"Say?" cried the youngster. "They can say nothing that will do any good when they are talking to a madman. He sees Fame coming down the pike, and he's blind to all the tricks of that devil. It's a fact, Verslun! Leith is after the old man's cash — and after Edith Herndon as well."

I stood and looked at the youngster. His boyish face was aflame with indignation, and any suspicions I had regarding his good intentions were swept away immediately.

"After Edith Herndon?" I repeated slowly.

"Yes!" he gasped. "Oh, I knew you didn't like

the big, sallow brute. Miss Barbara told me how you turned him down cold when he wanted you to repeat that yarn to satisfy his curiosity. He's a bad egg, do you hear? He's out for trouble, and we're going to run into it head on before we finish the trip. Only for the girls I would have stayed ashore at Levuka."

"And the captain?" I questioned.

"We don't know about him," he snapped. "He's Leith's captain. I mean Leith put him in his job when the Professor chartered the yacht. Anyhow, he doesn't say enough to let any one know which side of the fence he is on. He has only learned to say yes and no, and he is mighty particular about the number of times he will use those words."

I laughed at the bitterness the youngster threw into his speech. It is good to be young. One can love and hate with some intensity, and it appeared to me that Holman had found marks for both adoration and hatred on the yacht that was slipping into the mysterious islands of the South Sea.

"You mustn't look at the black side of things," I said. "Leith's face is not a likable one, I will admit, but a lot of good fellows have ugly dials. It seems that the Professor wants skulls, and it appears that Leith knows of a spot where he can gather up the oldest specimens in Polynesia. There's nothing wrong about that. As to Miss Herndon,

she struck me as being a young lady who was well able to look after herself."

"That's all right," stammered the youngster. "Perhaps I said too much, but I had to speak to you."

"And I'm mighty glad you did!" I cried.

He gripped my hand and turned away, leaving me to my own reflections. It was a wonderful night. The silvery sea through which *The Waif* drove a path with plunging forefoot awoke strange dreams and fancies within my brain. All the mystery of the tropic night welled up around me, and my soul seemed to have suddenly awakened to the beauty of life. The veil of morbid pessimism that came before my eyes during the weary days I had spent upon the beach at Levuka was torn aside, and a wave of gladness entered my being. I felt that the voyage would be an eventful one to me, and I tramped the poop with a light step. Occasionally the sallow features of Leith persisted in rising before my mental vision to blot out the dream face that was continually before me, but I resolutely put the Professor's partner from my mind and fed myself upon the visions bred by the splendour of the night.

Holman had left me about an hour when I happened to glance at the patch of shadow that had attracted his attention while he was talking to me.

I stopped and watched it intently. Some one had crawled into the velvety strip and was lying perfectly still.

"Who is there?" I asked.

There was no answer. The strip of shadow broadened and narrowed as *The Waif* plunged, but I could discern nothing. Outside the captain and myself, the crew of *The Waif*, together with the six men that were with the Professor's party, were all natives, and I wondered as I watched the shadow why one should be crawling around as if afraid of being seen. It was possible that he was attempting to thieve something from the galley, and it was also possible that he was spying, as Holman had suggested.

I picked up a small iron pin and tossed it at the spot where I felt sure the islander was hiding. I didn't throw the pin with any force, although the yell that came out of the shadow would convince an onlooker that I had thrown it with murderous intent.

I sprang forward while the shriek of pain was still vibrating in the air, but the native was determined to have revenge for the rap from the iron pin. A knife flashed in the moonlight, and I staggered as the blade touched my forehead like a tongue of flame. A dark figure dashed along the deck toward the forecastle, and brushing the blood from my eyes I started in pursuit.

At the head of the companion-stairs I collided

heavily with Newmarch, who had just rushed up from the cabin, and the force of the shock nearly threw him off his feet.

"Confound it!" he cried. "What's the matter with you?"

"One of the Kanakas nearly cut my eye out!" I roared. "He flung a knife at me and ducked for the f'c'stle."

I left him standing in angry astonishment and rushed forward. I stood at the top of the ladder and listened. The only noises that came up were the shrill snores of the islanders, but the blood that streamed down my face made me forget prudence, and I scrambled down into the stuffy quarters, where the odour of natives was overwhelming.

A swinging lamp dimly illuminated the place, and I snatched it from its hook and swung it over the face of the naked occupant of the first bunk. A glance convinced me that his sleep was genuine. His mouth was wide open as he snored, and the native who feigns sleep hasn't enough sense to make his imitation more real by opening his mouth.

The man in the next bunk, a muscular Kanaka, had his face turned away from me, and in spite of his prolonged snore my suspicions were aroused. I thrust my hand beneath the single blanket that covered him, and was immediately convinced that I had discovered the culprit. The blanket was cold.

"Here, you scoundrel!" I yelled, dropping the lamp and poking him roughly in the ribs. "What the devil do you mean by trying to knife me?"

He opened his big eyes and stared at me stupidly, while the occupants of the other bunks, who were aroused by my shout, sat up and rubbed their eyes.

"Why did you throw that knife?" I screamed.

"I no throw knife," he muttered. "Me sleep, very tired."

The pain of my wound maddened me, and I seized him roughly and dragged him toward the ladder with the intention of bringing him before the bilious captain.

I had grasped a rung to haul myself up when a heavy boot came down on my fingers and the voice of the captain screamed an objection.

"Stop that business!" he shrieked.

"But this devil tried to knife me!" I protested.

"Let him go!" yelled Newmarch. "Do you hear me? Let him go this instant!"

I let go my grip of the Kanaka, who immediately dived for his bunk and curled himself up as if he had no further interest in the proceedings. The captain was beside me then, and his quick breathing betrayed his excitement. As I lifted the lamp back to its place the light fell upon his thin features; their pallor surprised me as much as his words.

"Too many wonderful things happen to you!" he stammered.

"Why — what do you mean?" I queried.

"Never mind!" he snapped. "If you start a rough house on board this boat I'll stop you before you get well under way."

I was too astounded to reply. The blood upon my face and hands was plain evidence of the wound I had received, and the captain's indifference left me breathless. Without another word he turned and scrambled up on deck, and I followed.

Once out of earshot of the listening crew I determined to make another effort to show him that my conduct was justified.

"That devil was sneaking in the shadow of the galley all the evening," I cried. "I attempted to stir him out and he jerked the knife at me."

He stopped in front of me, made one of his conversational feints by opening his mouth and shutting it again, then dived hastily for the companion, leaving me to search for sympathy in the moonlit night. I remembered as I endeavoured to staunch the wound, the question which I had put to Holman concerning the captain only an hour before, and I smiled grimly as I bound my handkerchief about my forehead. Captain Newmarch of *The Waif* hadn't risen in my estimation since the moment I made the inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORM

HOLMAN glanced inquiringly at the piece of sticking plaster above my right eye when he met me on the deck the morning after the knife incident, and I grinned sheepishly.

"You were right about that patch of shadow last night," I remarked.

"How?" he queried.

"This came from it," I replied, touching the plaster with my finger as I spoke.

The boy whistled and looked around cautiously. "You'll be getting wise in a day or two," he murmured. "She said you would when I told her this morning about our conversation of last night."

I laughed, and he turned suddenly toward me.

"Do you think we'll put in anywhere in the Samoan Group?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "Why?"

Holman came closer. "If we do I'm going to get the girls ashore and keep them there," he muttered. "I don't care what you think of the proposition. This trip is going to be a tough one, and I'm certain there is some deviltry afoot."

I tried to laugh at the serious face upon the youngster, but the conviction which he threw into his words choked my mirth. Whether it was the little brush with the Kanaka or the gloomy forebodings of the boy I couldn't tell, but I felt a trifle anxious after my first night aboard *The Waif*.

"But there is nothing to be gained by running away if we do put in to a port," I growled.

"How is that?" stammered Holman.

"Well, if Leith is an admirer of Edith Herndon, as you say," I argued, "and if the captain is in league with Leith, the yacht wouldn't leave till the girls came aboard. Besides, the Professor wouldn't go on without them."

"I don't know about the Professor," grunted Holman. "That old doodlebug only thinks of the silly specimens that he is going to collect down here. If he had any love for his daughters he wouldn't have brought them along."

"But you told me they insisted on coming."

"So they did!" he retorted savagely. "But they knew that the poor old fool was in the hands of a scoundrel and they wouldn't let him go alone. They think they can protect him from that devil, and it nearly makes me cry to hear them say so."

Miss Edith Herndon and her sister came up on deck at that moment, and if I was impressed by the calm sweetness of the elder girl's face on the previous afternoon, the strength and beauty of it as I saw it in the fresh morning sunlight made my heart pound violently against my ribs. The prettiness of Miss Barbara made the quiet dignity of the elder sister more noticeable, and that apparent strength of character made me doubt Holman's contention that she would be unable to help the scientist if Leith's motives were discovered to be criminal.

It was Barbara's keen eyes that detected my plaster, and I squirmed as I saw the light of curiosity in her eyes.

"Oh, tell us how it happened!" she cried. "Please make it a night attack upon the yacht, Mr. Verslun! I heard a wild cry just after I retired and I felt sure that war canoes had surrounded us. They always surround the ill-fated ship, don't they?" she continued merrily. "And the ship is always ill-fated in all the really thrilling sea stories I have read!"

Leith came sauntering aft as she fired her ques-

tions at me, and he stood near Miss Edith with his dull eyes fixed upon me as I answered.

"I'm afraid I cannot feed your imagination today," I replied. "I tripped over a coil of rope, and the deck sprang up and bumped me."

I glanced at Leith as I spoke, and I fancied I detected a glint of amusement in the lustreless eyes that were turned in my direction. Whether it was caused by my hastily constructed lie or by the girl's inquiries I could not tell, but my dislike for the clumsy giant made me suspicious about his knowledge of the incident of the preceding evening, and I felt certain that he was smiling at my fib.

As if he wished to do something which would convince me of his ignorance of the happening, he hastily changed the subject.

"The captain thinks we are in for a spell of bad weather, Mr. Verslun," he drawled; "are you of the same opinion?"

"If signs go for anything we are," I replied. "We are running into a zone of trouble."

He walked away without further speech, and the two girls went below in response to a message from their father. The Professor was slightly indisposed, and he demanded that his daughters remain with him in the cabin. The selfishness of the scientist irritated Holman exceedingly, and he made bitter

comments about him during the hour or two he kept me company.

"I never yet met one of those scientific gazaboos who didn't think he was something more than mortal," he growled. "I try to keep on good terms with the old bone measurer, but his vanity nearly turns me sick. Do you know what he told me yesterday?"

"What?" I asked, amused at the youngster's annoyance.

"Said that he might mention my name in the report of the expedition that he would send to some old research society in the States. When I didn't show any signs of elation he got offended, so I guess I'm cut out of the history."

He went grumbling down into the cabin, and I watched the ocean. The barometer was low, and out of the west a pack of fat black clouds swarmed up from the horizon, stacking themselves one upon another till they resembled a huge pile of rounded boulders which a sudden puff of wind might bring toppling down upon us. The faint scouting puffs of air — "the devil's breath" of the poetical Polynesians — whined through the stays, but the small waves that tried to rise in expectation were clouted back by the heavy, oppressive atmosphere that ironed out the ocean till one's imagination pictured it waiting for the word like a strained runner on his mark.

It burst at last. Three violent blasts ripped over us like projectiles, and the "song of the dead men" was twanged upon the straining ropes. *The Waif* stopped for an instant, as if debating whether she would run or cower before the onslaught, then she dipped her nose into the mad lather that rose around her and plunged forward. That jump seemed to be a challenge to the storm. It burst upon us in all its fury, and the yacht became a tiny seesaw upon the murderous Himalayas that rose around us.

Great chunks of green water came hurtling over the rail, thundering down upon us till *The Waif* was buried in a boiling turmoil from which she would leap and shake herself, only to be pulled down again when the next sea fell upon us. When she sprang out of the lather, those devilish, snarling, snaky waves sprang after her, slapping at her flanks, tearing and biting at her like a pack of wolves. There's an awful likeness to a wolf pack about storm waves. When you see them all foam-lathered stretching out like a pack in full cry, or watch them leaping up as if they were trying to see whether the unfortunate ship had been torn down by one of their band, you begin to credit them with some sort of intelligence

The Waif was no poppycock yacht, built to dodge about the Solent and run for Cowes if the wind blew a capful. She had been built to hold her own with the hardest slamming seas that ever chased a shat-

tered hull, and it was lucky for us that she was. The storm that came screeching after us from way across the Coral Sea was one of those high-powered freak disturbances that juggle with lumps of water like a vaudeville performer juggling with cheap crockery. It took the tops off those rollers and pelted them at us, and the wind seemed to yell in triumph when the yacht was buried in the whirlpools in which she dived headlong.

All through the night we raced before it, and through the following day *The Waif* never paused for an instant in her mad race to the eastward. The Kanakas became demoralized with fear, and I forgot the trouble hanging over the heads of the girls and their father as I helped Newmarch drag the crew from their bunks to cut away the wreckage of the vessel.

I saw a new side of the captain during those hours. A very devil of energy took hold of him with the coming of the storm, and he became a human dynamo. He pounded the frightened crew unmercifully, dragging the screaming islanders back to their work by the hair of their heads, and heaping upon them curses that were strange and blood-curdling. That he was a good sailorman I had little doubt. He handled *The Waif* with skill and patience, while the crew, with rolling eyes and quivering lips, were so terrorized by his wrath that they fled to do his bidding.

I had been wondering since the moment when he had ordered me to let go my grip of the Kanaka in the f'c'stle, if he was afraid that any disagreement between me and the knife-thrower would start trouble with the crew, but from the way he hazed the niggers during the storm I was convinced that it was not through any fear of them that he ordered me to leave my assailant alone. The conviction did not increase my love for him. As I viewed the happening he was inclined to shield the big brute who threw the knife simply because the offence did not appear to be one that merited punishment, and this view was not pleasing to my nerves.

It was on the second day of the storm that a little incident happened which is worth mentioning. Toni, the small Fijian who had chanted the song of Black Fernando's hell, was caught by a huge wave and pounded hard against the cabin. The mad turmoil of water swept his nearly lifeless form into the scuppers, but before another comber could snatch him overboard, I managed to reach his side and drag him into safety.

I forgot the incident in the whirl of happenings that followed, but the Fijian had a longer memory. Late that afternoon he was holding the wheel with Soma, the big Kanaka who had jerked the knife at me, and as I stopped to peer at the binnacle he beckoned me toward him.

"That was me that sing," he shrieked, as I put down my head. "I tell damn big lie you an' Miss Herndon."

"Why?" I asked, amused at the peculiar manner in which he tried to express his gratitude for the rescue of the morning.

"Big Jacky tell me not say anything," he screamed. "He tell it to me one big secret all that talk about waterfall. Tell me not to tell any one. You know why?"

I glanced at Soma and found that he was straining his ears to catch the words the other was shrieking, and as I was more than suspicious of him, I promptly closed the conversation.

"I'll see you in the morning," I roared.

The Fijian nodded and I fought my way forward, wondering as I clung to the rigging what the pupil of the Maori had to tell me about the song

The wind had ceased somewhat on the morning of the third day, but the snaky rollers were still racing after the flying yacht. A watery sun peeped out from between the driving cloud masses, the rays glinting through the heads of the waves that curled menacingly as the battered yacht drove through them.

Newmarch hailed me from the poop when I came on deck, and there was a peculiar look upon his scrawny features as he addressed me.

"Do you know that nigger you rescued?" he asked.

"Toni?"

"Yes."

"What about him?"

"You did your heroic stunt for nothing," he remarked. "The fool can't be found, so I guess he went overboard in the night."

The news came as a shock to me. Toni's last question that he had put as he clung to the wheel with Soma had flashed through my mind several times through the night. He had asked it in a manner that insinuated that I might be interested in the reasons why Big Jacky, his companion on the wharf at Levuka, wished the whereabouts of the white waterfall to remain a secret, and now his disappearance blocked my inquiries. I felt annoyed with myself for not listening to what the Fijian had to say at the moment he confessed that he had lied, and then the face of the listening Soma came up before my mental eye. Soma was a person that I was beginning to cordially dislike.

I turned to Newmarch and fired a question at him.

"Do you think he was helped overboard?"

"Why, no," he said slowly. "Why do you think that?"

"Oh, nothing," I replied. "I thought his narrow escape of the morning would have made him careful."

It was a few hours after this conversation that I

had my first chance of speaking to Edith Herndon since the moment we had run into the disturbance. The girl poked her head out of the companionway, and I hastened to assist her out on deck. It was her first sight of the damage which the storm had done to the yacht, and she gave a cry of alarm as she looked at the splintered spars and the cordage that cracked in the wind like the whips of invisible devils.

"Oh, Mr. Verslun, we are a wreck!" she cried.

"Not quite," I said, gripping her arm to steady her as *The Waif* took a header. "We've weathered the worst of it and we're still sound. The storm centre has slipped away to the north, and we can count ourselves out of the ruction for the present."

Her shapely hand clutched my wet oilskins as the yacht plunged from the back of an enormous swell, and I was so busy noting the beauty of the hand that I had no eye for the sallow face that peeped from the companion. Leith's bass voice rose above the noise of the waves, and there was an angry note in it.

"This isn't a nice place for you, Miss Edith!" he cried.

The girl half turned her head, looked at him for a second, then without any intimation that she had heard what he said, she turned again toward me and started to cross-examine me upon the amount of

damage we had sustained. I thought that the white, shapely hand tightened its grip upon my wet sleeve at the moment Leith's bass voice came booming to our ears, and I blessed the big brute's interference for the thrill which I derived from the pressure of her fingers upon the greasy coat.

But Leith was not to be denied. The cold stare, instead of driving him back into the cabin, only roused his temper. Very cautiously he climbed along the heaving deck to the point where we were standing, and, clutching a rope, he swayed backward and forward immediately behind us.

"Miss Edith!" he called.

The girl turned her head sharply. "Well?" she cried.

"This isn't a proper place for you!" roared Leith. "One of those seas is liable to come aboard at any moment, and you might be washed away before any one could assist you."

Edith Herndon's lips showed the slightest trace of a smile. "You had better be careful too, Mr. Leith," she retorted. "Mr. Verslun is holding on to me in case one of those old gray rollers should make a sudden leap, but you have no one to hold on to you."

A frown passed over Leith's face like a cloud shadow across a yellow plain. He slackened his grip on the rope and lurched toward us.

"You must go below at once!" he screamed, addressing the girl. "Your father is too ill to look after you at this moment, so the duty is mine. There is danger here, and I order you below!"

He touched her shoulder with his big fingers that resembled talons, but the girl made a quick side movement and slipped from his grip.

"Do not touch me!" she cried fiercely. "How dare you put your hand on me!"

But Leith's temper was up at that moment, and he was angry enough for anything. He made a spring for the girl's hand, and I thrust my shoulder forward to bump him off. *The Waif* nearly stood on her end at that instant, and her acrobatic feat combined with the push flung Leith off his feet and sent him rolling ludicrously along the deck.

Miss Herndon gave a little cry of alarm and sprang for the companion-stairs, down which she disappeared without taking a glance at the brute on the wet planks. Leith picked himself up, gripped a loose backstay with his left hand and swung himself toward me, striking out viciously with his free right hand when he came within hitting distance.

The blow landed on my shoulder, and I returned the compliment with an uppercut that jerked him from his swing rope and sent him stumbling backward against the rail. The fall stunned him for a few moments and he rolled about in the wash; then

Soma, the Kanaka who jerked the knife at me, rushed from the galley door and dragged him to his feet. The native steered him to the companion-way, where he stood for a moment glaring at me as if undecided whether to continue the fight or beat a retreat, but the wild plunging of the yacht convinced him that the spot was not one where he figured to advantage, so he stumbled below.

I looked around and saw Holman clinging to the rigging, his boyish face wearing an expression of extreme pleasure.

"You're getting wise," he cried, as he scrambled toward me; "but don't think you've walloped him. He'll come back at you when he has a better opportunity of beating you up."

CHAPTER V

I MAKE A PROMISE

THE morning following the unpleasant incident with Leith broke clear and sunny. The Pacific, as if tired after its mad pranks of the preceding three days, was a shimmering stretch of placid blue water, and the shattered spars and loose cordage of *The Waif* were the only reminders of the terrific storm that had swept us before it.

Captain Newmarch set all hands at work to repair the damage, and before midday we were bowling along under as much canvas as we could spread. The storm being directly from the southwest had not carried us from our course, and Newmarch chuckled when he had taken an observation.

"We'll strike it in the morning," he growled.

"What? Penrose Island?" I asked.

"No, the Isle of Tears," he answered sharply.

"The Isle of Tears?" I repeated.

"That's what I said," he remarked sourly. "And now you know as much as I know. It was kept a little secret by the orders of my employers, but we are so close to the spot now that I don't think it will matter if I let the cat out of the bag."

"And is it there that the Professor will conduct his search?" I asked.

"You had better ask that question of Professor Herndon," he replied. "I know nothing about what they'll do ashore."

He left the poop before I had time to put another question to him, and as I walked up and down I turned over in my mind the tiny morsel of information I had received. The captain's secrecy was peculiar, to say the least, and as I reasoned that Professor Herndon knew absolutely nothing of the Islands, it was quite evident that the orders prohibiting Newmarch from making known the exact destination of the yacht had come from Leith. It was not the first time I had heard of the Isle of Tears. Strange stories floated across the Pacific concerning the little islet east of the Suvaroff Group, and out of the reticule of the mind I attempted to drag these stories and piece them together during the

minutes that passed after Newmarch had given me the information. They were not pleasant stories as I remembered them at that moment. The island had a "past." The mention of it brought hazy recollections to natives — recollections that were too misty to put into words, but which the untutored mind connected with happenings that were anything but pleasant. And I recalled a night at "Tonga Pete's" place on the Rue de Rivoli at Papeete, when a sailor from a copra schooner in the bay, who had been marooned upon the island by Captain "Bully" Hayes, told a wild, weird story of unexplainable happenings that he had witnessed during the two days and two nights he had spent ashore.

Holman came hurrying upon deck as I was endeavouring to remember all the story that the sailor had told, and the youngster immediately rushed me with the news.

"The captain has just told me," I said.

"Well, Leith has just given the information out in the cabin," he cried. "They must have decided to give it out at the same moment."

"But the Professor?" I asked. "Surely he knew. Do you mean to say that he was ignorant of the fact that it was the Isle of Tears and not Penrose Island that we were making for?"

Holman laughed at my question. "You haven't spoken much to him, Verslun. He couldn't remem-

ber the name of a place three minutes. He only knows that there are archæological treasures on this island we are going to, and he doesn't care two cents about its name. Leith has told him some tall stories about the camp, judging by the way the old man's eyes shine when he mentions it. Yesterday he read me Leith's description of stone *hamungas* and things that are supposed to have been built before Julius Cæsar invaded Britain, and he's pop-eyed with joy as he thinks how he'll yank Fame by the tail when he gets on the ground and snapshots the affairs. Gee! I'm glad I haven't got a kink for digging up relics and dodging about places that went to smash thousands of years ago. A vice like that is more expensive than the poker habit."

"Well, Newmarch says we'll strike it early in the morning," I said, "and then we'll see whether your suspicions are correct."

"I'm infernally afraid they are," snapped the youngster. "I wouldn't care ten cents about the brute only that the girls are aboard. I felt sorry when I saw him climb to his feet yesterday. If you hit him again hit him with something that will crack his skull. He's a devil, Verslun, and before we are much older we will find it out."

I laughed at his gloomy forebodings, and as Miss Barbara Herndon came on deck at that moment he raced away and left me to my own meditations.

My thoughts were mixed. I had pleasant and unpleasant ones. If Leith was the scoundrel that Holman suspected, the two girls were in danger, and now as we neared the island where they would leave the yacht to accompany their father, the clutch of fear was upon me. On *The Waif* I felt that I had some little power, but on land, more especially on the lonely island toward which we were heading, that feeling of protectorship which the sailorman has for his passengers would be lost. If Leith knew the island, and it was evident that he had visited it before, any villainy that he contemplated would be held in check till he was ashore and in command of the expedition and I would be powerless.

I recognized that Holman's fears were without solid foundation. They were transmitted through Barbara Herndon, but I also recognized that the elder sister would hardly support the statements unless she had good grounds for her anxiety. Her woman's intuition had branded Leith's motives in bringing the Professor into the Islands as bad, and the sallow-faced giant could not erase the impression. The actual reason for trickery was a matter of speculation. Professor Herndon was wealthy; it was his money that had fitted out the expedition, but how Leith expected to benefit himself by treachery was more than I could tell. Still, try

as I would to fight off the impressions that Holman's tongue had fixed within my mind, I was unable to alter the opinion I had formed of the man the moment I met him. There was an atmosphere about the yacht that was unexplainable. Try as I could to find legitimate grounds for fears I could not. The Professor was a scientist who wished to study certain things the whereabouts of which were known to Leith. Apparently the Professor was satisfied with the bargain he had made. Leith, as the two girls had informed Holman, had called upon their father at the Langham Hotel in Wynyard Square, Sydney, and, after fascinating the old man with his stories, had presented his credentials and made a bargain with him which resulted in the chartering of the yacht. His former life was a mystery that he guarded jealously from the probes which the girls had skilfully endeavoured to use. It was clear that he had spent many years in the Islands, but that fact is not one that is generally put forward as a recommendation of good character. The South Sea holds a large percentage of the nimble people who manage to be in another spot when Dame Justice throws her lariat. The Law of the Fringe has made curiosity a criminal offence, and a new name covers more than charity.

I had had little chance of speaking to Edith Herndon since the moment I came aboard, but I deter-

mined, after I had looked at the matter from every side, that I would ask her point blank if I could be of any assistance. Leith's face was the only prop he put forward as a support to his claims of respectability, and his face betrayed him.

My chance came early that evening. A big tropical moon rose out of Asia and spread a silvery wash upon the ocean. Professor Herndon and his eldest daughter were leaning over the rail, but the moment I joined them the old man informed us that he had to see to his scientific outfit so that everything would be in readiness for the landing on the following morning, and he hurried off and left us together.

The girl did not speak for a few minutes, and I made no attempt to break the silence. Somehow I felt that her intuition had already told her that I wished to speak about the happenings of the morrow, and her opening remark proved that my surmise was correct.

"You will stay with the yacht, I suppose?" she questioned.

"I cannot say," I replied. "Captain Newmarch hasn't spoken to me about the matter. Does your father intend to go far inland?"

"Father has just told me that the actual distance is not great, but the travelling is very hard. It seems that it is only a few miles to the spot where

Mr. Leith says that father can see all the sights and obtain all the specimens he desires, but those few miles will take us four days to travel. There are all kinds of obstacles in the way."

"And you are not afraid?" I stammered. "You do not dislike the idea of going?"

She lifted her head and looked me in the face, the big amber eyes shining softly in the moonlight.

"I dread it," she said quietly. "It is foolish to say so, but ——"

She stopped speaking and turned her face away from me. In the little silence that followed I heard the *plop plop* of the waves against the side of the yacht. A native chanted a Samoan love song in the fo'c'stle, but that and the soft whine of the pulleys were the only sounds that disturbed the night. We seemed such a long way from civilization at that minute, and a great pity for the girl's plight gave me sufficient courage to make a proffer of my services.

"Miss Herndon," I spluttered, "if I could do anything to help you, please tell me. I might help you if you wish. Tell me what you think is best."

"If you stay with the yacht you can do nothing," she murmured.

"Then you want me to go?" I cried. "You would like me to go with ——"

"Father and Barbara and me," she said softly.

"Mr. Holman is coming, and if you could come too ——"

"I can!" I cried. "I will go with the party if you say so."

"But if Captain Newmarch orders you to stay with the yacht?"

"He can order away," I spluttered. "I am going where Leith is going, that is as long as Leith accompanies you and your father."

Something moved on the top of the galley as I put my resolution into words, and I sprang up quickly. The moon made every inch of the yacht as bright as day, yet I was not quick enough in my rush. A tin pan, knocked down by the eavesdropper, rolled across the deck, but the spy had fled.

"Some one was listening to us," I explained as I returned to the girl's side.

"I am sorry then that I asked you to accompany us," she murmured. "I am dragging you into our troubles, Mr. Verslun, and it is not right."

"Hush!" I cried. "Your troubles are mine just because you are a woman out on the very fringe of the earth where you can get no one else to help you bear them. You see I can claim a right in this spot. This is the jumping off place of the world down here, and an offer of assistance must not be refused."

She stood in front of me, a tall, splendid figure,

the moonlight silvering the piled masses of hair and giving one the impression that her head was surrounded by a shining halo. Suddenly she put out her hand and took mine.

"I accept your offer gladly," she said softly. "You are very, very kind, Mr. Verslun. It may be, as you say, the jumping off place of the world down here at the very outposts of civilization, but the power that protects one in the crowded cities is surely here as well. Good-night, friend."

It was an hour after the time when Miss Herndon went below that I asked the captain's permission to go along with the expedition. He plucked his scrawny beard with a nervous hand as he stood staring at me.

"What the devil do you want to go for?" he asked.

"For the fun of the thing."

"I don't know," he muttered. "I'll see Leith."

He turned away and I walked for'ard. The beauty of the night was extraordinary. The yacht seemed to be veneered with a soft luminous paint that gave us the appearance of a ghostly ship skimming over a ghostly ocean.

At the top of the fo'c'stle ladder I found a native stretched full length and sobbing mightily. He walloped his head against the planks when I endeavoured to get him upon his feet, and the sobs shook his frame.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Toni! Toni! Toni!" he wailed. "Toni he gone. Toni, my brother, all same come from Suva, now him dead."

"I'm sorry, but it can't be helped," I said. "He should have been more careful."

The native lifted himself from the deck and glanced around fearfully. Satisfied that there were no listeners he dried his eyes and crawled upon his knees to the spot where I was standing. "He not washed overboard," he whispered. "Soma stick one knife in him, then he tip him over. Me see him, very much afraid."

"When?" I asked.

"Night afore last," he gasped. "Captain see him do it. Very bad thing. Toni, my brother, all same work one time Suva."

Holman joined me when I relieved the captain late in the night; I told the youngster what I knew about the disappearance of Toni.

"Who knifed him?" he asked.

"The big Kanaka who pulled Leith out of the scuppers when he fell yesterday."

"Holy smoke!" cried the boy. "I'd like to get the strength of things on board this boat. Why, that big nigger is going to be the guide of the expedition on shore."

"Who says so?"

"Leith pointed him out to the Professor this afternoon," answered Holman. "I was talking to the old scientist at the time."

I whistled softly. If Soma was a henchman of Leith's it was clear to me why the captain had shielded him the night he jerked the knife at me when I dropped the pin upon his woolly head, but why Toni had been put away was a mystery.

"Is it any good of attempting to convince the Professor?" I asked.

"Not a bit," snapped Holman. "The girls have been imploring him to turn back this last three days while we were stuck in the cabin, but he won't listen to them. He's a maniac, that's what he is. He doesn't know what those two women are suffering through his darned foolishness, and if he did know it wouldn't trouble him. If you want the real extract of selfishness you must make a puncture in a scientific guy with a hobby, and you can get as much as you want."

"Well, I'm going along to see what happens," I said. "If Leith refuses to accept me I'm going just the same."

Holman gripped my hand — gripped it fiercely, then he left me hurriedly.

I tramped backward and forward as *The Waif* sailed steadily through the waves of glittering mercury. A few days before, when I was an occu-

pant of "The Rathole" in Levuka, life seemed to be empty and cold, but a wonderful change had come in those few days. Although I had not spoken to Edith Herndon more than half a dozen times, it appeared to me that it was those few short conversations that had chased the loneliness and morbid thoughts from my mind. Her very presence stimulated me in a manner that I could not express, and as I stared out across the moon-whitened ocean I started nervously at the thought which had sprung suddenly into my brain. It was an insane thought, and I tried to laugh it away. Edith Herndon was as far above me as the moon was above the waves that were silvered by her beams. I pictured myself lying like a beachcomber upon the pile of pearl shell when the strange chant of the Maori and the dead Toni concerning "the way to heaven out of Black Fernando's hell" had come to my ears, and I blessed the new influence which had come into my life.

"My way to heaven lies in this direction," I soliloquized, and the quivering yacht went bounding on as I allowed wild dreams to race unchecked through my brain.

CHAPTER VI

THE ISLE OF TEARS

A SLEEPY Samoan in the main cross-trees screamed a message to the deck while the pink flush of the tropical dawn was still in the sky, and *The Waif* plunged through the water toward the island. One after the other the members of the expedition came on deck. Leith stumbled up when Newmarch shouted down the information, and the big brute watched the tiny spot that came gradually nearer; the Professor danced up like an adventurous boy, and he gurgled ecstatically as he peeped over the rail; while the two girls came up arm in arm and looked in silence across the dawn-reddened waters. Holman's gaze travelled from the island to Leith and back again to the island as

if he was trying to trace a criminal connection between the two.

As the yacht drew closer a strange silence seemed to fall upon the vessel. The Professor's gurgles of joy died away slowly, and none of the others seemed inclined to break the stillness. The crew and the half dozen islanders that Leith had brought to carry provisions and specimens were also silent. They were grouped for'ard, but not a murmur came from them as *The Waif* crept slowly ahead, feeling her way cautiously into the little bay on the north side of the island which Leith had suggested to Newmarch as a good anchorage.

The peculiar stories that had gone abroad concerning the Isle of Tears were responsible for most of the wide-eyed looks of wonder which the imaginative Polynesians directed upon the shore; the strange predicament in which they were placed tied the tongues of the two girls; the Professor was thinking of the archæological treasures, while thoughts that one could only guess at prevented Leith and Holman from speaking.

The island had a strange, wild beauty that seemed to throttle speech. The underlying coral reefs were of colours that ran from pure white to gorgeous crimson, and the effect upon the water above them was wonderful to behold. *The Waif* seemed to make her way over a floor of beautiful parquetry which

Mother Nature had been constructing for centuries. Chameleon-tinted seaweeds stretched upward, waving backward and forward like the hair of sea nymphs hidden in the crevices of the multi-coloured rocks.

The vegetation on the shore was weird and wondrous. The trees immediately near the edge of the bay were covered with riotous lianas that looped themselves like pythons from limb to limb, and from whose green masses blazing red flowers appeared at intervals like watchful eyes. Scarlet hibiscus and perfumed frangipanni were everywhere, while climbing jasmine tried to cover up the black basalt rocks in the foreground as if to hide everything that was ugly from the eyes of the visitor. The sweet, intoxicating odours came out to us in greeting, yet the place seemed to inspire us with a feeling of awe and mystery that became more oppressive as the yacht moved lazily across the bay.

I glanced at Edith Herndon at the moment the anchor plunged down into the bed of coral, and the look of perplexed wonder upon her face startled me.

"It looks a nice place, yet it feels an awful spot," she murmured. "All those snaky creepers with their coloured flowers seem to be hiding something."

I understood her feelings regarding the place. That look of weird expectancy, common to places that are cloaked with a tremendous silence, had

gripped the two girls, and the yacht seemed homelike when they compared it to the shore.

"Oh, Edith," cried the younger sister, "I wish father wouldn't go!"

"So do I, dear," murmured the elder girl, "but it is useless to attempt to persuade him to give up the quest."

"But I hate the place!" cried Miss Barbara. "Don't you?"

"Oh, no," stammered Edith, bravely attempting to cheer the spirits of the younger girl. "You will not be lonely, Barbara. Mr. Holman and father and I will be with you, and perhaps Mr. Verslun will be in our company."

Newmarch approached at the instant and squeaked out an answer to the request I had made the previous evening.

"I asked Mr. Leith if you could go with him," he said, "but he doesn't think you would be of any use. He has all the help he requires, so you had better stay on the yacht."

There was a slight grin on his thin face as he imparted the information, and his merriment tickled me. I had made up my mind without waiting for Leith's decision, and I was more pleased than annoyed at knowing that my presence was not desired with the party that went inland.

The anchor had hardly touched the bottom be-

fore Leith started to transship the provisions that were required for the trip across the island. The sight of land seemed to stir the sallow-faced giant out of the lethargy that had gripped him on the way down from Levuka. He suddenly discovered that the mantle of authority was upon his shoulders, and he bullied the island boys as they lowered the stores.

Holman was right when he stated that Soma was the man that Leith had picked as first assistant. The big Kanaka was placed in charge of the other five carriers, and he immediately imitated Leith by shrieking out orders and strutting about in a manner that was ludicrous. Professor Herndon was bubbling over with excitement. The stories which Leith had fed to him continuously concerning the remains of an extinct civilization had worked him up to a pitch that bordered on insanity, and it was pitiful to watch him as he made endless notes in the bulky notebook.

"I shall be known throughout the world inside three months," he whispered to Leith.

"In less than that," drawled the giant.

"Yes, you're right!" snapped the dream-fed scientist. "If everything is as you say our task will be an easy one. Are you ready Edith? Barbara, come along!"

He climbed down the ladder with a haste that was

nearly his undoing, as he let go his grip before the boat was directly beneath him. Holman saved him from a ducking, but his solar topee, which had a distinctly scientific look, was soaked in salt water before it could be rescued.

Captain Newmarch stood by with a look of unconcern upon his thin face as the two girls went over the side, and he gave an unintelligible grunt as Leith followed. Within two hours after *The Waif* had cast anchor the two boats containing the stores and the ill-assorted explorers were making for a small promontory that stretched out like a green tongue into the sparkling waters of the bay.

Once on shore, Leith put Soma and the carriers in the lead, Holman and the two girls next, with himself and the Professor bringing up the rear, and in that order they moved across the little strip of white sand that glittered like diamond dust. The heavy green foliage came out to meet them, dropped over them like a veil, and left us staring at the riotous creeper masses with the brilliant flower eyes that appeared to be watching *The Waif*.

Newmarch gave a peculiar chuckle as he turned toward me when the party had disappeared.

"Now, Mr. Verslun," he cried, "we have plenty work to keep us busy for the week or so we will be here. Get about it the moment the boats return, and keep the men on the jump."

I nodded, and he went below without another word, leaving me still staring at the spot where the explorers had dived into the leafy wall. The strange loneliness of the place seemed to clutch me hard at that moment, and I mentally abused myself for not making a stronger protest against the whole affair. But I knew as I damned my own inactivity that protest would have been useless as far as the Professor was concerned, and the filial affection of the two girls would not allow the old ancient to wander off alone.

I had planned to allow the party a few hours' start before I made any attempt to follow, feeling certain that I would be able to find the track, and, moreover, I wished to catch up to the expedition at a point where Leith would have no chance of verifying the story I would tell to account for my presence. The big brute would probably think I was lying when I told him that Newmarch had sent me after him, but the Professor's desire to push on would probably prevent him from making an effort to check my story by sending a runner back to the boat. And luck was with me at that moment. As I racked my brain in the construction of a suitable excuse to account for my appearance, my eyes fell upon the Professor's camera that had been overlooked in the hurry of departure, and I sprang upon it joyfully and hid it till the time had elapsed. Knowing

the importance which the old scientist attached to the photographs which he intended to take, I knew that he, at least, would reason that the captain had acted wisely in sending me in pursuit with the instrument, and I trusted that his gratitude would move him to get Leith's permission to allow me to remain with the expedition.

The party had been gone some six hours when I slipped over the side into the dory. Newmarch was below, and only one of the crew was on deck. I seized the oars and struck out for the shore, but I had hardly covered twenty paces when the captain rushed to the rail, took one glance at me, and then dashed toward the companion-stairs.

I sensed the motive in that mad dash for the cabin, and I pulled madly. Thoughts of Edith Herndon thronged my brain, and I drove the dory toward the promontory with every ounce of strength I possessed. To return to the yacht while she was in the eerie jungle-growth under Leith's protection would be worse than death, and I didn't pause for an instant when the captain's squeaky voice hailed me.

"Come back at once!" he shouted. "Are you coming?"

I bent my back to the oars and pulled with every muscle strained. The perspiration half blinded me, but one glance upward convinced me that I had

sensed the captain's motive when I saw him rush from the side. He was standing on the poop, taking deliberate aim at me with a Winchester rifle that he had taken from the rack in his own cabin.

It seemed an age before he fired. The bullet missed the side of the boat by about three inches, and I shrieked my defiance. The devil had my nerves on edge, but the green tongue of land was close, and I pulled as never man pulled before.

A bullet lodged in the stern of the boat, another splintered the end of an oar, and then the rifleman's nerves must have got the better of him. The succeeding shots fell wide, and I whooped like a madman as I drove the boat on to the green tongue of land. Springing out hastily I made a dash across the white strip of sand, and dived into the moist creeper growth.

I lay there panting, watching the yacht to see what Newmarch would do. It was impossible for him to leave the yacht to follow me, but I guessed that he would make an attempt to communicate with Leith. And I guessed rightly.

I had not been five minutes in the bushes when a boat put off for the shore. It contained three of the crew, two Tannese and the Fijian that I had found mourning the death of Toni, his "all same brother who had worked with him at Suva." They pulled for the spot where I had left the dory, and here the

Fijian sprang out, while the others proceeded to tow the dory back to *The Waif*. I surmised that Toni's "all same brother" had been sent to carry a message to Leith, and I lay in the bushes waiting as he raced toward me.

Cautiously he clawed his way through the undergrowth, and when he was certain that the creepers had completely veiled him from the eyes of watchers on the yacht he picked up a small flat stone from the ground, drew a yachting knife from his belt and crouching on his heels started to sharpen the blade. As he rubbed industriously he sang a weird tune in his native tongue, rounding off each verse with five words in English that explained his industry. The words were: "Now I'll kill you, Soma," and the chant was a poem of consolation to the spirit of the dead Toni, assuring it that the hour of vengeance was at hand, and that Soma would go to the great unknown the moment he got within reach of the yachting knife.

I poked my head from my hiding place, and the Fijian turned quickly.

"I think the captain told Soma to kill your brother," I said softly. "If the captain didn't tell him, Leith did, Kaipi."

Kaipi stopped sharpening the blade and fixed his big eyes upon me. "I not to speak to you," he said. "Kapitani tell me not to. I go catch up

Leith, give him one piece of paper the Kapitani gave me."

"But Soma?" I asked.

"I kill Soma when chance comes," muttered Kaipi.

"Well, we're of the same mind, Kaipi," I said pleasantly. "Soma is no friend of mine and I'll help you as much as I can if you turn over the note which the captain gave you and do just what I tell you. Otherwise, Kaipi, I have a revolver, and a knife is no match for a revolver."

The Fijian considered the matter for a few moments, his dreamy eyes watching me the while. At that moment duty was forgotten in the thirst for vengeance upon Soma, and the debate with his conscience was of short duration. He pulled a note from the folds of his pareo and tossed it to me with a short laugh.

"Me not care about that," he grinned. "Me catch Soma, that's all."

The note was exceedingly brief. It read:

"The mate is following you. — NEWMARCH."

Kaipi had returned to the job of sharpening his knife in which I had interrupted him, and at intervals he assured the dead Toni that vengeance was only a matter of a few hours. As far as I was concerned the captain could not have chosen a better messenger.

"Kaipi," I said, tearing the note into small pieces, "you have been sent to help me find Leith and the Professor. See, I have the Professor's picture maker. He forgot it this morning, and the captain sent you and me to take it to him. Do you understand?"

The Fijian grinned, tried the edge of his knife blade with the ball of his thumb, then sprang to his feet.

"And don't be in too great a hurry to fix Soma," I cautioned. "Toni's spirit can wait a few days till you get a suitable opportunity. Now, we'll strike the trail."

Kaipi grinned again, put his sharpened knife into his belt and plunged into the dense undergrowth. The snaky, moist lianas made progress next to impossible. They clung around our legs like live things, and I damned the Professor's idiotic craving for notoriety as we waded through the clammy creepers in search of the trail made by the party. The prickly rope-like vines seemed to be in league with the devil who was leading the aged scientist and his daughters into dangers that made my brain dizzy as I attempted to dissect the possibilities which imagination put forward.

At last we found the traces of Soma's handiwork with an axe, and guided by these signs we hurried forward. The ground rose gradually toward the

centre of the island, where columns of basalt loomed like the towers of feudal castles against the pure Venetian blue of the tropical sky. But the sky was visible only for moments that were far removed from each other. The crawling vines that overran the trees made an impenetrable barrier against the sunlight, and most of the time we were stumbling along in a mysterious twilight that increased my nervous agony. Masses of rock of volcanic origin were thickly strewn around, and anything like fast travelling was impossible.

The sun dropped slowly toward the west, and we had great difficulty in holding to the path. The axe marks and the branches broken by the carriers were really the only signs that we had to go by, but the eyes of the Fijian were exceedingly sharp in detecting the slightest evidence left by the party. We passed the spot where they had lunched, and increased our speed in an endeavour to overtake them before nightfall. The silence and unexplainable mystery of the place made me anxious to catch up with them before the darkness came down, while hunger and revenge made Kaipi move at a speed that was most unusual.

Darkness came down like a suffocating blanket, and we halted.

"No go farther," muttered Kaipi. "Better make fire and sleep. Catch um to-morrow."

I sat down while the Fijian gathered a pile of rotten wood, but before he could set fire to the heap I was on my feet clawing my way into the darkness in front. From somewhere out of the inky night came the voice of Edith Herndon lifted up in a little Italian melody that I had heard her singing the night we left Levuka. It seemed to me that she suspected my near presence, and that she was singing to guide me to the spot where the party had camped.

Five minutes afterward Kaipi and I stumbled into the circle of light round the fire, and Leith sprang to his feet with a growl of rage.

"What's this?" he cried. "Who the devil gave you permission to come here?"

"The captain sent me," I replied, looking straight at the giant as I fired the lie at him. "The carriers forgot Professor Herndon's camera, and Captain Newmarch sent Kaipi and me after you."

Leith's mutterings were drowned by the scientist's cries of joy as he took the camera from my hand, and the big brute had time to recover himself before the Professor had stopped chattering. I guessed that he reasoned that it would be bad policy to show that he was angry at my arrival, while the camera partly convinced him that I had told the truth. His surprise and the Professor's evident pleasure made me think it an opportune moment to put

forward a request to stay with the party, and I put my wish into words.

"Captain Newmarch said that Kaipi and I might go along if you and Professor Herndon had no objections," I lied. "He thought we would prove useful."

Leith scowled angrily, but the Professor gave an immediate assent to the request. His short-sightedness prevented him from noticing the frown which passed over the face of his partner, but the sour look fled immediately the two girls expressed a desire to keep me in the party.

"Oh, please let Mr. Verslun come," cried Miss Barbara. "It will make it ever so much more pleasant."

"I was thinking of the stock of food," growled Leith, as if attempting to explain his evident displeasure.

"I'll go on half measure and let Mr. Verslun have the other half," laughed Holman.

"And he can have some of mine," cried Miss Barbara.

"And mine," murmured Edith.

Leith grinned as he noted the feeling of the party. It would not be diplomatic to go against the wishes of all, and he knew it. With a wave of his hand he ordered Kaipi to the fire where Soma and the other five islanders were sitting, and nodded his head as an intimation that I could stay.

"By the way," he growled, as I fell upon the plate of tinned salmon which Edith Herndon handed to me, "who was doing the shooting this afternoon?"

"I was," I replied. "I fired my revolver half a dozen times when we got off the trail and couldn't find our way back to it. I thought on account of the way that the path wound in and out that your party might be near the spot where we were bushed."

He made no further comment and I breathed a sigh of relief. Unless Newmarch sent a second messenger to make sure that the news of my desertion would reach Leith, I felt that I was safe.

CHAPTER VII

THE PIT

WE WERE under way early on the morning after I joined the party. Leith had the camp astir by daybreak, and after a hasty breakfast we trailed off behind Soma and the carriers, heading directly toward the basalt towers that rose up in the middle of the island.

I for one was not sorry that we were making an early start. All through the night I lay awake expecting another member of the crew to rush into camp with a message from Newmarch to Leith, and when we started on the trail, I took particular care to lag behind the procession for the first few hours so that I would be in a position to intercept any diligent runner from *The Waif*. I took the

first opportunity of telling Holman of the manner in which the bilious Englishman had hastened my departure with the Winchester, and the youngster's face wore a perplexed expression.

"That precious captain is Leith's partner in villainy," he cried, "but our hands are tied. The Professor is simply crazy with delight over the things that the brute is going to guide him to, and all our suspicions don't amount to much when you put them together. You see we've got nothing definite to go on at present. All we can do is to watch and wait, and be ready to act when the moment comes. Soma and his five mates are Leith's pets, you can bet your life on that, but we have one ally in your friend Kaipi."

The path of the preceding day was smooth compared to the ground we climbed over that morning. There was no trail as far as we could see. Soma, who was in the lead, found his way by occasional marks that could only be visible to the eye of a native. Barbara Herndon remarked on one occasion that there was danger of our getting lost, but Leith grinned at the remark.

"Soma has been here more than once," he replied. "What he doesn't know about this place isn't worth knowing."

The path continued to ascend, but the thick tropical growth did not lessen during the tramp

of the morning. Leith walked with the Professor, who appeared to be in a state of joy bordering upon hysteria, while Holman and I in the rear tried to assist the two girls over the roughest sections of the road. I thought as we scrambled through impenetrable scrub and crawled over rocky piles that it was the strangest expedition that had ever set forth. If Leith was the wicked devil that we suspected him to be, four persons were risking their lives to gratify the whim of a half-crazy scientist who was dying for notoriety. He would not be turned aside from his pursuit of the specimens which Leith had told him of; his daughters would not desert him, and their resolve had brought Holman and myself. We were blind automatons that the fame-seeking archæologist was dragging at his heels. He did not consider the sufferings of the two girls; least of all did he think that Holman or myself was doing anything to safeguard his life or property. He was blind to everything but the natural curiosities around him, and he made frequent entries in the notebook that was to be his crutch to Olympus.

Leith did not allow me to remain long in the rear. He called me up to the front, and very politely asked me to help in hustling along the carriers who were inclined to dawdle as the way grew rougher, and, although I would much rather have had the

task of helping the two girls, I had to accept the position without demur. Leith was in charge, and Holman and I were only intruders who had on standing, and whose food was paid for by the Professor.

We halted at midday in an ugly-looking spot far up the shoulder of the mountain that we were climbing, and through a break in the trees we caught a glimpse of the Pacific. The ocean seemed directly beneath us, and yet, as Edith Herndon expressed it, we seemed to be a thousand leagues away from it.

"This horrible silence makes me long for the clean sound of the waves," she whispered, as I rolled a stone over to make her a seat. "This stillness stops one from speaking. Do you know that Barbara and I haven't spoken a word during the last hour? We simply hadn't the courage to make the effort."

Under the watchful eye of Leith I endeavoured to cheer her up, while inwardly I cursed the prattling old Professor who chattered of the honours he expected as the rewards of his discoveries. The affair was enough to bring tears to the eyes of a man with a heart of stone.

"I'm just thinking we should have stopped this business before it got this far," muttered Holman, as he reached closer to get a light for his cigarette.

"What should we have done?" I asked.

"We halted at midday in an ugly-looking spot far up the shoulder of the mountain."

"I don't know," he growled. "We should have done something though. Pity we didn't lose Leith overboard with your friend Toni."

"What's wrong now? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing has happened," he replied. "I wish something would. This silence is beginning to put my nerves on edge, but I'm afraid to yell out for fear that I might wake something that has been dead for centuries. Does it strike you that way?"

"Very much."

"Well, it's the same with the girls," muttered Holman. "The stillness of the place has brought their ordinary conversational tone down to a whisper."

Leith lurched across and interrupted our conversation. "Get the boys going, Mr. Verslun," he said. "We want to cross the Vermilion Pit while the light is good, and it is hard going from here on."

We started forward up the boulder-strewn slope, and with each step the difficulties of the ascent became greater. I took an axe and helped Soma chop a path which would make it easier for the two sisters, but no matter what amount of trouble we took, they found it a difficult matter to follow. Once, goaded into fury by Leith's attempts to hurry the girls when Holman was assisting them over a particularly rough stretch, I turned upon the old scientist who was puffing along with the natives in the lead,

The half-insane ancient heard my outburst to the end, staring at me through the thick lenses of his glasses as if I was some new kind of a bug whose appearance he wished to implant firmly within his mind.

"Science calls for sacrifices," he squeaked. "If my daughters are heroines who wish to share my hardships in the pursuit of information that will be of great benefit to the world, I fail to see what it has to do with you, sir!"

"But they have no interest in your silly discoveries," I cried. "They are doing this infernal tramp to look after you. Do you hear?"

"Confound you, sir!" he screamed. "Mind your own business and don't interfere with mine!"

I choked down my wrath as Leith came crashing through from the rear, and the old egoist, flushed and ruffled, dropped back to meet him, evidently convinced of my insanity through my inability to appreciate his efforts to prove that the skulls of long-dead Polynesians possessed peculiar formations they were foreign to the islanders of the present day.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when we began to draw near the Vermilion Pit which Leith had mentioned when he had urged haste at the midday luncheon. The surroundings became more strange and mysterious with each step we took.

The basalt peaks that we had noticed from the deck of *The Waif* were now quite close to us, and they seemed to move in upon us from both sides. The trees and lianas became less numerous, and the black rocks came toward us in a sinister manner that conjured up thoughts of a dead something toward which the encircling ridges were guiding us like the arms of a corral. The place was fear-inspiring. It had the unearthly appearance that made the imaginative minds of the ancients people the silent woods with devils and dryads. The soft moaning of the Pacific was barred out by the leafy barriers, and we walked in a silence that was tremendous. The ticking of our watches sounded to our strained ears like the blows of a hammer, and once, when the Professor sneezed mightily, Miss Barbara gave a scream of fear before she realized what had caused the noise.

The ascent became still more difficult. The natives puffed under their loads, and Holman rushed angrily to the front and demanded a halt on behalf of the girls struggling in the rear. During the few minutes that Leith grudgingly allowed them in which to recover their breath, the youngster hurried up to the spot where I was busy fixing the loads of the natives, and in a nervous whisper he asked my opinion of the route.

"Where the dickens are we going?" he cried.

"This is the most eerie-looking patch of country that I have ever seen in my life."

"Leith said that we had to reach the Vermilion Pit before the sun went down," I replied. "I guess it is somewhere at the end of this staircase that we are trying to climb."

"Oh, Gee!" cried the boy. "Say, this game has got those two girls scared to death. There's something wrong with the place, Verslun. My skin feels it. The island looks as if it has been left too long by itself, and I'm beginning to think that all those rocks and trees are watching us and wondering what we want here."

That was how it felt to me from the moment I had left *The Waif*, and I had tried vainly to overcome the feeling. The island seemed to resent the appearance of human beings. It possessed a personality through being too long by itself. It had wrapped itself round a dead past, and we were filled with the awe which suddenly strikes the unimaginative globe trotter who wanders into the cool recesses of a Hindu temple. And I was of the same opinion as Holman regarding the trees and rocks. Traders in the lonely spots of the Pacific have gone insane through becoming convinced that the mountains and the trees were watching their movements, and the trees and rocks upon the Isle of Tears struck me as possessing a watchfulness that smacked of the

supernatural. I thought of the story which the sailor told in the café chantant at Papeete just then, and I was inclined to give it more credence than I had at the moment he narrated it.

But I tried to rally Holman so that he would cheer up Edith Herndon and her sister.

"You're like an old woman," I growled. "Go back to the girls and make them laugh over some funny stories instead of getting nightmares about the scenery. Why, this place reminds me of a real pretty bit of scenery near my home town in Maine."

Of course I lied when I said that. You couldn't find any scenery like that outside the tropics. That place was queer; there wasn't the slightest doubt about that. I recalled as I stumbled along how a trader at Metalanim in the Caroline Islands had swam out to our schooner when we were down there the previous year, and how the poor devil had told old Hergoff, the captain, that a chatak tree at the back of his hut had begun to make faces at him, and I began to understand the complaint that had gripped that trader as I climbed along by the side of the puffing islanders. He had been jammed up too close against a personality. When a place has been too long by itself, as Holman had remarked, it cultivates a strength that tries the nerves of an explorer, more especially if it is situated near the equator. Places like Papua, the Caroline Islands,

parts of Borneo, and the Never Never country in inland Australia seem to possess a fist that attempts to push you off when you endeavour to bring the atmosphere of civilization into a silence that has been unbroken for centuries.

Holman went back to the sisters, and we moved slowly forward. The basalt rocks came closer, showing plainly through the breaks in the lianas that grew less thickly on the higher slopes. The creepers fell away slowly, as if they had done the work they were required to do, and before we realized it we were walking between two natural walls of rock about eighteen feet high, above which the sky looked like a strip of blue paper that rested upon the marvellously even tops of the barriers.

The Professor was gurgling joyfully as we tramped through that miniature cañon. He was bumping up against new wonders at every footstep, and he stumbled continuously as he endeavoured to jot down his impressions in the fat notebook. The Professor felt nothing mysterious about the place. He had the bullet-proof skin of your cold analyst who yearns eternally for facts.

"Wonderful geological formation!" he chattered. "My friend Professor Hanlaw of Oakland would enjoy a glimpse of this spot. A geologist could spend a lifetime here."

Leith's sallow face was disturbed by a grin as he

listened to the old science-crazed ancient disbursing information regarding the formation of the rock. It troubled me little at that moment whether feldspar and augite were the two largest components, and I knew that Holman and the two girls were not interested. We knew that the place was ugly and sinister, but feldspar and augite didn't give it that look.

The height of the walls increased as we advanced. We were in a narrow roadway scarcely more than twelve feet across, while on each side rose the nearly perpendicular rocks that blocked our view of the country immediately beyond. The ground beneath our feet was covered with small bits of lava from the crevices of which the moist flabby leaves of the nupu plant stuck up like fat green fingers.

As we stared ahead we noted that the road seemed to dip suddenly as if the highest point of the island was reached at that spot, and the prospects of a walk upon a down grade were cheering after the stiff climbs. As we neared the place, Soma, who was walking about ten paces in front of the carriers, slackened speed, and the islanders dropped back till Leith and the Professor led the procession.

Leith halted and beckoned to the two girls and Holman, who were some distance in the rear. "Hurry up!" he cried. "You'll get the sight of your lives in a few moments."

"What is it?" gurgled the Professor.

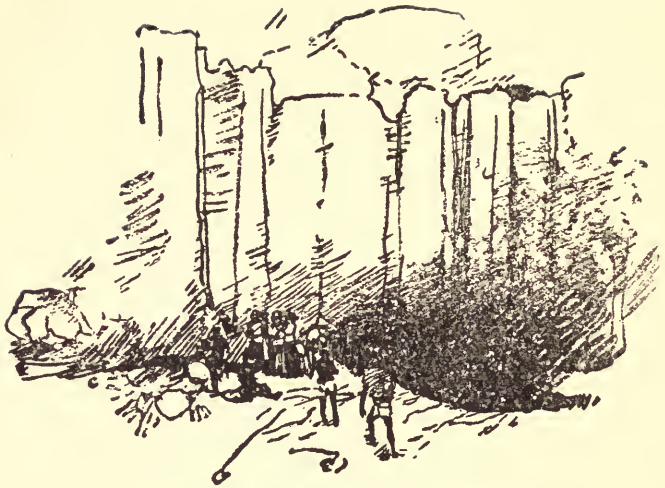
Leith grinned as the scientist dipped his lead pencil into his open mouth so that he would be able to dab down first impressions the moment he turned his thick lenses upon the wonders.

"You'll see in a moment," replied the big brute, as he walked slowly forward, and just as he spoke, we did see.

A ridge of bright vermilion came up suddenly about one hundred feet from the point where the road seemed to dip, and we walked forward wondering what lay between the spot where the track ended and the bright barrier of rock that appeared to rise higher as we approached the end of the trail. We seemed to sense the approach of something that chilled and yet attracted. The place possessed a devilish fascination. It seemed to repel with its very uncanniness, and yet I was aware that I was imitating Holman in thrusting forward my head in an endeavour to see what filled the space that was hidden from our eyes.

The desire was soon satisfied. Fifteen paces brought us to a point that left the strange curiosity naked to our eyes. The vermilion walls, thirty yards in front of us, formed part of the sides of an enormous circular crater, and we stood spellbound as we pulled up within a few feet of the ledge and looked into the fearsome depths beneath.

"Ladies and gentlemen," drawled Leith, looking around at us with the air of a cheap showman springing a novelty upon a gaping mob, "you are on the edge of the Vermilion Pit, the greatest wonder between Penang and the Paumotus."



CHAPTER VIII

THE LEDGE OF DEATH

I SUPPOSE that Leith was not far wrong when he gave that place the credit of being the most wonderful spot in Polynesia. None of us felt inclined to contradict him as we stood near the lip of the crater and gazed into it. The thing appalled us. It looked as if some fiend had bored it between those barriers of black rock as a trap for man and beast. The entire inner walls, probably from the action of intense heat upon a peculiar kind of rock, were of a bright vermilion near the top, gradually changing into darker shades as the eye followed them deeper and deeper till the outline was lost in the depths of the mighty cauldron.

The inky clouds, which seemed to heave like black masses of cotton wool far down in the abyss, left the imagination to perform acrobatic feats as it attempted to picture the possible depths that lay below. The thing was weird, terrible, fear-inspiring. It looked like a mighty crucible in which infernal things might have been manufactured in the days when the world was taking shape.

The rays of the westering sun beat upon the sides directly opposite our point of observation, and the colours seemed to leap from the rock. It glowed in a manner that was indescribable. Sudden flashes came from it as if the vermilion mass was studded with blazing carbuncles, but the fascinating beauty of the part that was exposed to the rays was in violent contrast to the cold depths where the mind pictured a body falling through leagues of space.

For about five minutes no one spoke. The awful suddenness with which the thing had appeared in our path throttled conversation. An inner self connected the pit with the singular feeling of depression which had gripped us the moment we landed upon the island, and we stood breathless, wondering stupidly how we had sensed the vermilion-lined horror into which the path led.

It was the Professor who broke the silence. The momentary awe which he experienced when the strange freak of nature sprang up before his eyes

was dispelled by the vanity which prompted him to air his knowledge concerning the cause of the vivid colours which seemed to radiate from the walls. He prattled upon the effect of heat upon minerals till he made us dizzy, and Holman broke in upon his chatter with a question that he fired point blank at Leith.

"But what did we climb up here for?" asked the youngster. "Did we come for the view alone?"

Leith grinned as he surveyed the questioner. "No, we didn't come for the view," he answered. "It happens to be on the way to our destination."

Holman looked around at the basalt walls that hemmed us in on both sides, and then glanced at the pit in front.

"But we can go no farther," he said.

Leith's smile spread across his ugly flat face. "You are too young to know everything," he sneered.

The youngster's eyes opened as he looked again at the circular pit with its brilliantly tinted sides. The answer perplexed him, and he waited anxiously for an explanation.

"But how can we?" he asked.

Leith stood for a moment before replying, then he moved closer to the edge of the crater and pointed down.

"The road is directly beneath you," he remarked. "If you come closer to the edge you can see it."

Holman glanced at me in amazement, and moved by the one impulse we stepped toward the ledge. The rim of the vast pit, at the point where Leith was standing, was composed of porphyry of a dark-green shade, and as we neared the edge we noticed that this had been worn to that peculiar velvety smoothness that one notices on the pillars of Indian temples, where the sweaty hands of millions of worshippers have helped in the polishing process through unnumbered centuries.

Leith noticed that our glances were directed upon the peculiar polished portion of the rim, and his grin broadened.

"You won't be the first to go over on to the track below," he drawled. "If I had a dollar for every man who slipped over here since the world began I wouldn't bother with specimens for American and European museums. See, the ledge is directly beneath, and it leads away to the right."

We stretched out our necks and looked, and I tried to thrust back the exclamation that came to my lips. Directly beneath the polished part of the rim, and about four feet below it, was a ledge barely three feet wide, and this narrow path wound away to the right and disappeared through a cavernous opening in the brightly tinted walls of the crater. The ledge was bare and unprotected, polished to the same velvety smoothness as the spot

on the rim near which we stood, and when one looked at it and then let his eyes glance over the infernal depths that were immediately beneath, the brain reeled with thoughts of the danger to which a climber would be exposed while making his way along it to the cavern in the wall.

Holman took a great breath of air and turned savagely upon Leith.

"What sort of a fool game are you up to?" he cried. "What do you mean?"

Leith's lower jaw came forward menacingly. "You had better hold your tongue!" he roared. "If you don't I'll — I'll —— "

He stopped and glared at the young fellow, a murderous expression creeping over his sallow face. The half-voiced objection to the route had stirred all the sleeping devil in him, and the big stubby fingers crooked as if certain they would be called upon to grip Holman's throat.

"You'll do what?" asked the youngster coolly.

"I'll bundle you back to the yacht!" screamed the giant. "You've been allowed to come on this trip through the good nature of Professor Herndon, but you mustn't think you have any voice in the direction of affairs."

Holman did not reply. The dangers of the path over which it was evident that Leith intended to

take us dazed him, and he looked at me as if asking confirmation of his opinions.

"But the young ladies?" I inquired, looking at Leith. "Do you expect them to go down on to that path?"

"I don't expect the young ladies to do anything against their inclinations," he answered blandly. "They have come with the expedition through no urging from me. Regarding the ledge, there is absolutely no danger, and it is the only path by which we can reach the interior of the island. Soma, go over the rim and show them."

Edith and Barbara Herndon, with their father, moved up closer to the edge as the grinning Kanaka stepped forward to obey Leith's order. He walked quickly to the polished porphyry slab, moved cautiously to the extreme rim, then, turning his back on the crater, he dropped upon his hands and knees and lowered himself down till only his grinning face appeared above the top.

We crept closer and watched him walk along the ledge toward the cavern, apparently unaffected by thoughts of the death which a slip of his foot would bring upon him. Returning to the spot beneath the polished slipping-off place he put his muscular hands into two clefts in the slab above and drew himself up on to the solid earth.

"No danger," he cried. "All boys go over here

before they could call themselves men. That long, long time ago."

The Professor grabbed his notebook as he heard the explanation, and he immediately proceeded to deluge the Kanaka with questions.

"What was that?" he squeaked. "You say all the boys had to climb over there?"

"That's so," grinned Soma. "This place make'em test. Young boy go over this quick he make plenty good fighting man. Feller go over slow he no good."

The Professor's pencil moved quicker than the pen of a court stenographer. The Kanaka's remark had brought him much copy, and the dangers of the path were forgotten as he jotted down the information.

"And they went over here?" he cried, his eyes wide open as he gazed at the edge of the crater.

"Right over here," grinned Soma. "See rock mighty slippery here. All boys' hands and feet do that. Polish it mighty fine."

"'But surely this test is not carried on at the present time?" cried the scientist. "When was this wonderful custom in force?"

"About the time that Christopher Columbus was paddling to America," replied Leith. "There are no natives on the Isle of Tears now. Soma is speaking of a time when these islands were inhabited."

The Professor gurgled like a drowning mule. "This is a most interesting morsel of information," he murmured. "Hand me my camera, Barbara; I wish to take a snapshot of the place."

The delay irritated Leith, but he kept his temper in check while the Professor fussed and focussed to get a good view of the spot.

"The old fool should be in a padded cell," growled Holman. "He's so busy digesting that tale that he's not thinking of the dangers of this path. I'm going to speak to him aside."

"I hope you have better luck than I had," I whispered. "I bullied him as we were climbing the slope, and I believe he complained of me to Leith. He sees a mental picture of himself with bay leaves on his brow, and he wouldn't consider the nerves of twenty daughters."

I was right in my prophecy. When Holman approached the old maniac he ruffled up like an angry porcupine, and he screeched out his opinion concerning people who would not mind their own business.

"You're the second person who has kindly informed me what I should do," he exclaimed. "And who are you, sir? You have no standing with this expedition! This is a scientific exploration party, but it seems to me that a number of busybodies have pushed their way into it. I shall ask Mr. Leith if he cannot stop this interference!"

Leith listened till the Professor had finished speaking, then he turned savagely upon Holman. "I've given you one chance," he roared, "and you don't seem to profit by it. Now I'm not going to speak again! If I have to tell you to keep your finger out of this pie on another occasion, you'll go back to the yacht, and you'll go back without provisions, do you understand?"

The youngster was not lacking in courage, and he stood up boldly as the bully screamed out his threats.

"I won't go back," he said quietly. "At least I won't go back alone."

Leith's big fingers crooked ominously as he glared at Holman, but Edith Herndon prevented the conflict that was imminent.

"Mr. Holman is only concerned about our safety," she cried, stepping in front of the youngster. "He thinks that the path is dangerous for women, and it is on that account he protests."

Leith recovered his temper with an effort. "It is not dangerous," he drawled. "We will put a strong rope under the arms of each so that it will be impossible for an accident to happen. Soma will go first with one of the other boys, and they will guide every one into the opening. Once through there the path leads into a valley in the centre of the island, and the road is perfectly safe."

Edith Herndon looked at her sister as Soma unwound the strong manilla rope which he had carried from the yacht, and they exchanged glances that showed clearly the terror in which they viewed the journey across the ledge.

Leith frowned as he glanced toward the pit. The colours were fading from the brilliant sides as the sun sank lower, and the inky clouds that seemed to heave far down in its mysterious depths fought their way slowly upward as the invading sunbeams were driven out. It became more terrifying as each moment passed.

Leith seemed to recognize this, and he turned upon the Professor. "If we don't get down in half an hour we will have to postpone it till the morning," he exclaimed. "I didn't look for a hitch like this. I tell you that there is not the slightest danger, and the young ladies will be just as safe upon that ledge as they are up here."

The Professor turned to the two girls as he closed his camera. The mad hunger for notoriety evidently blinded him to the dangers which would have been perceptible at any other time, and Holman's remarks had not improved his temper.

"Come, come, Edith!" he entreated. "We must get along. You hear what Mr. Leith says? There is no danger. A rope will be put around your waist, and an accident will be impossible."

The younger girl took a glance at the terrifying abyss and shrank back to Edith's side.

"Wait till the morning," she whispered.

"What is that?" asked the Professor.

"Barbara wants you to wait till the morning," replied Edith. "I think it will be better. This light doesn't make the place look attractive."

Leith moved his big hands in a manner that showed he was willing to wait till the following day, and Barbara Herndon gave a little gasp of relief. Soma coiled the rope that he had laid out in expectation of an immediate descent, and the whole party moved back about thirty yards from the obstacle in our path. As I analyzed my own feelings, on turning my back upon the spot, I felt that Barbara Herndon was not alone in desiring to make the trip when the wholesome sunbeams were pouring into the shadowy cauldron.

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE VALLEY OF ECHOES

HOLMAN and I had sat up late discussing the vermilion-lined crater on the night we halted upon its brink, and it was Leith's voice that roused us in the morning. He showed no signs of resentment over the difference with Holman on the preceding afternoon, and he attempted to joke with Barbara Herndon as we made a hasty breakfast.

"I hope you slept well?" he grinned.

"I didn't," she replied. "I had dreams of that place, and they were perfectly horrid dreams."

"Well, dreams don't amount to much," he replied, "and this sunshine will soon make you forget them."

The sunshine, or probably the night's rest, had a wonderful effect upon the nerves of the younger girl, and she viewed the crater with much more

composure than on the previous afternoon. Soma had the rope in readiness when we approached the edge, and together with another carrier he slipped down upon the slippery pathway, and, with head above the rim, grinned an invitation to the party to follow his example.

"Now who goes first?" asked Leith.

I had settled that matter with Holman as we sat smoking the night before, and I stepped forward while the youngster gripped the rope with Kaipi and the other four carriers. We had decided that I should go down to the ledge to assist the two girls to the cavern, while he should stay above ground to make certain that no hitch would occur while they were being lowered.

That place wasn't so bad when you turned your back upon it. After the rope had been adjusted I crawled back carefully till my toes hung over the edge, then thrusting my hands into the two small crevices in the rock I slipped over, feeling at the same time that peculiar sensation in the pit of the stomach that one gets when an elevator drops about six floors at a fast gait. I was perfectly satisfied that a critical examiner, reasoning on Soma's theory of courage, would not have marked me down as a great fighter by witnessing the careful manner in which I made the descent.

I didn't attempt to look at the gulf beneath me

either. Not that one could be ignorant of its existence. Every inch of skin seemed to be yelling out the information to my brain, but I kept my chin up, and tried to ignore the black depths which chilled me whenever I allowed the mental photographs of the place to rise up before my vision.

The Professor followed me over the edge, and was guided by Soma to the opening in the cavern. Leith came next, and when he landed upon the smooth path he stood directly underneath the slipping off spot with the evident intention of remaining there to assist the two girls when they were lowered down. The post was one that Holman had assigned to me as we talked the matter over on the previous evening, and the moment Leith showed no inclination to leave the spot, I started toward him from the mouth of the cavern, where I had stepped to allow the Professor to pass me by.

The big bully immediately noticed my movement, and he waved his hand as a signal for me to go back.

"But I'm coming," I snapped.

"What for?"

"For the fun of the thing," I shouted, and at that moment I forgot the pit in my anxiety to reach the spot before Edith Herndon was lowered over.

"Go back at once!" roared Leith. "I will see to the safety of the ladies."

I was close to him at that moment, and I returned

his angry glare. "I'm going to do that," I cried, "if the devil himself ordered me out of the way."

Leith looked like the devil at that moment. His sallow face seemed to heave as if a disturbed emotional centre was immediately beneath the flabby cheeks, and he cursed in an undertone as Edith Herndon slipped from the edge and swung for a moment above the ledge before she managed to get her footing.

Leith attempted to take her arm as her feet touched the unprotected path, but the girl, though unnerved by the ordeal, shook off his big claw, and with her hands clasping mine I led her across the short but dangerous ledge of rock that led to the opening in the wall. I felt strong enough to fight a dozen devils like Leith at that moment. The trusting manner in which the dear girl had given her hands into mine conferred upon me a strength which the crusader of old felt surging through his body when his consecrated sword blade was delivered into his hands.

I returned in time to render the same help to Miss Barbara Herndon, while Leith still remained upon the path, his manner suggesting that he had discovered something humorous in the situation. Holman followed Miss Barbara, and then came the islanders, who scrambled over the ledge with that utter disregard for safety noticeable in the

actions of the unimaginative savage. Holman's face seemed to have altered during the preceding thirty minutes. The ready smile, which I had first noticed when he awakened me on the wharf at Levuka, was gone, and a set, defiant look had taken its place. The happenings of the day before, or the possible forebodings concerning the immediate future, had changed him from a boy to a man.

Soma stood at the mouth of the cavern as we passed through, and he grinned at the Professor. The Kanaka had discovered that the Professor placed a monetary value upon his information regarding the long-dead past, and he was ready to contribute to the contents of the fat notebook whenever the opportunity occurred.

"All good people in this party," he cried. "That's mighty plain."

The Professor dived for his lead pencil. He had a scent for copy that a New York reporter would have envied.

"How is that, Soma?" he spluttered.

"Wizard men say so," grinned the Kanaka. "Wizard men tell much truth."

"But what did the wizard men say?"

"They say that only the bad boys can slip," answered Soma. "No good men either. Big hole just for bad people. That what witch doctors say long, long time ago. They call it Ledge of Death."

The Professor's pencil raced madly across the paper, and Holman looked back at the black depths with a grim smile upon his clean-cut features.

"I suppose there have been exceptions," he remarked quietly. "There are exceptions to every rule, and I suppose an occasional bad egg escaped a fall into this abyss in spite of the wizard men's prophecy."

Leith looked up quickly, and he flushed angrily when he found that the young fellow's eyes were upon him. Barbara Herndon gave a little hysterical laugh, and the Professor stopped writing and looked around inquiringly as if he was in doubt whether he had missed something of importance.

"What is it?" he inquired. "I didn't hear."

"It was nothing," replied Leith, in his slow, drawling voice. "Holman suggested that the word of the wizard men might not be infallible, and lest we have some one who ran the gauntlet under false colours we had better move on so as to keep the exception out of danger."

The cavern, into which we passed from the slippery ledge, did not lead into the interior of the mountain as one would be inclined to think after viewing it from the top of the crater. We had hardly traversed it for more than sixty yards when we were once again in the bright sunlight, in what appeared to be a deep, wide valley in the centre of

the island. The basalt cliffs surrounded the place on every side, and although we had great doubts regarding Leith's veracity, we felt inclined to accept his word that the path by which we had come was the only one by which we could reach the spot where we stood. The circles of black rocks above the tops of the highest trees, though indescribably beautiful, were strangely repellent in their weird conformation. They struck us as the walls of a prison from which the only way to liberty lay across the path in the crater.

The trees — ebony, chatak, dakua, and sandal-wood — grew here in greater numbers than we had met them on the first day, while the lawyer-vines and thorny creepers rivalled the devilish meshes that had held us back as we climbed the slope to the Vermilion Pit. Like green serpents they covered the treetops, and as we struck forward in the same order as we had marched on the first day the solemnity of the place was more apparent than ever. It appeared that Nature, for some reason of her own, had made the place difficult of access, and that our invasion was something that the trees and vines protested against.

But in spite of the strange melancholy of the place, the two girls were in much better spirits than they had been on the previous day. The successful passage over the ledge had brought about

a reaction, and a remark of Holman's caused Barbara Herndon to laugh with all the spontaneity that was noticeable upon *The Waif*. The effect of that ripple of laughter was startling. The sound rebounded from the rocky cliffs, cannoned against the barriers opposite, and then bounced backward and forward till the whole atmosphere of the valley seemed alive with the laughter of sprites. For quite five minutes we stood listening, then the silence chased the last faint echoes out across the cliffs, and we breathed again.

"It is the Valley of Echoes," said Leith. "The cliffs throw back the sound in a marvellous manner."

"I'll not laugh again, not in this spot," murmured Barbara Herndon. "Those noises chilled my blood."

In spite of a blazing sun we found the air unpleasantly cool in the shaded spots as we struggled slowly through the undergrowth. The moist flabbiness of uncommon tropical plants startled us whenever the leaves brushed against our faces and hands, while the constant popping of the green pods of the nupu, the sounds resembling nothing so much as the groans of a person in extreme pain, did not have a cheering effect upon the party. The Professor was the only one who seemed to be actually enjoying himself, and even his joy was tempered by a malignant Fate. While endeavouring to dot down some information tendered him by Soma, he

had tripped upon a vine that was in wait for such an opportunity, and he skinned his nose badly upon a projecting rock.

But rocks or vines would not dampen the Professor's ardour. He saw himself upon a pedestal that he would build out of the Polynesian lore and the relics which he would collect. With Spartan fortitude he would not allow the expedition to halt for one moment while the injured nose was being attended to, and he took up the interrupted matter with Soma before the blood had been staunched.

Kaipi worked himself close to me just before midday, and, with one eye upon Soma and the other five carriers, whispered a message.

"Soma much friend of big man."

"How do you know?" I questioned.

"Talk to him out back of camp last night," he murmured. "Me make believe sleep, me watch. I think I kill him to-day."

"Kaipi," I whispered, "if you wait a little while I promise you that you'll have your revenge for Toni's death. You watch Soma and the others, and when the time comes you can give him all he deserves. If you stuck a knife into him here Leith would shoot you."

Kaipi nodded his head and trudged forward as Soma came sidling toward us. The Fijian's desire to get revenge for his "all same brother's death"

was something that might be to our advantage later on, and I looked upon Kaipi as a staunch ally in the event of trouble.

We ate our midday meal in the sombre silence and again plunged forward. The appearance of gayety which Barbara Herndon had tried to assume after we had left the Vermilion Pit had passed away, and once again there was the look of pathetic helplessness upon the faces of the two girls. During the luncheon Holman and I endeavoured to make conversation, but the thoughts of both were upon their surroundings, and they answered questions with an effort. The prison-like appearance of the valley, and the utter absence of sound, both of bird and insect life, had a depressing effect upon their nerves.

Holman's face showed that the mental sufferings of the two sisters had worked him into a decidedly unfriendly state of mind toward the Professor and the big brute who was leading the old scientist on the mad hunt, and another quarrel was barely averted during the early afternoon. Leith suggested that Edith Herndon should walk beside him so that he might assist her over the rough parts of the way, and in the conversation that ensued the youngster asserted that the girl was in better company when she was walking with her sister and himself. Leith's voice rose to a roar as he made

another threat regarding what he would do if the youngster did not hold his tongue, but Holman was defiant, and an immediate conflict was only averted by the tact of Edith Herndon.

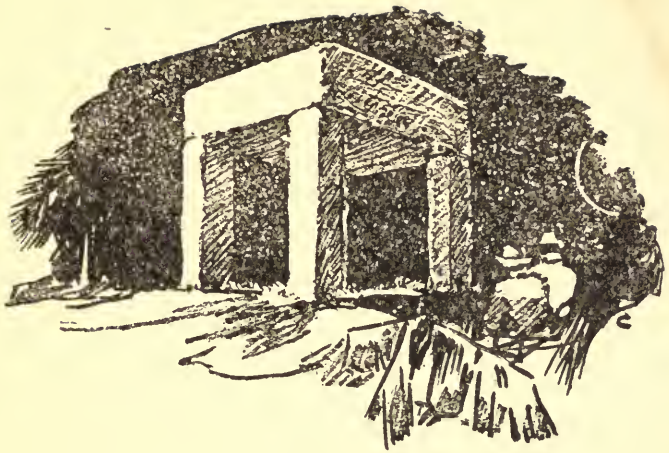
The afternoon closed in with us still tramping on. The blood-red sun slipped hurriedly toward the basalt barriers that encircled the valley, and as I glanced at the cliffs the picture of the creepy ledge, that was our only way back to the outer world, was continually in my mind. The knowledge that the velvety polish upon the block of porphyry was brought there by the hands of thousands who had once peopled the island or visited it from the adjacent groups was not provocative of mirth, and I knew that the feeling that they were journeying in a place that had been of special veneration in long past centuries was producing a depressing effect upon the two girls.

As the tropical twilight fell upon the valley we came to one of the strange stone structures that are to be found in the Tongan and Cook groups, and which have puzzled explorers who have sought in vain to find a reason for their construction or an explanation of the methods by which a savage people lifted the huge blocks of rock into position.

The one that suddenly appeared before us was situated on a small slope that was free from trees and creepers, and as it stood there, black and mas-

sive, one could fancy it part of the ruins of Karnak instead of a relic left by a people that were much below the intelligence of those who raised the wonders in the land of the Nile. The four supporting piers of stone were about four feet square and fully fifteen feet in height, while the immense flat rock that was laid upon them was more than twelve feet in length and breadth, with a six-foot thickness. It was moss-grown and gray, but the supporting pillars had not deviated one inch from the perpendicular, although the weight upon them was tremendous. The bed of coral rock on which they rested had proved a reliable foundation, and the singular structure had scoffed at time.

The Professor started a lengthy discourse on sacrificial altars the moment we halted, ranging from Stonehenge to Toluca in search of comparisons, but we were too tired to give it much attention. Holman remarked in a whisper that Soma could probably outpoint the Professor if it came to an array of facts concerning the probable uses of the gigantic table, and when I glanced at the Kanaka, as he stopped to listen to the scientist's discourse, I felt inclined to agree with the scoffer. Soma had an intelligence that lifted him above his class, and I was convinced that many of the Professor's surmises caused him secret merriment.



CHAPTER X

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

I THINK that Professor Herndon was the only person in the company who was quite contented with the day's doings on that evening when we camped near the table of stone. The polished slide and the ledge along which we had passed to the cavern stirred his imagination concerning the wonders that were before him, and he convinced himself that he had the god of his ambition by the heel. The fat notebook was made the repository of countless surmises regarding the period at which the ledge was in active use as a test for courage, and the stone structure that loomed up immediately beside the camp was tagged

with countless suppositions regarding its uses and its probable date of construction. Soma gathered in some easily earned shillings by raking his mind in search of traditions and retailing them to the scientist by the light of the fire. He made magazine prices for tales that he spun from his fertile brain, and the Professor could hardly write fast enough in the excitement brought about by the discovery of so much historical knowledge.

"It is wonderful!" he cried, pausing for a moment to polish the thick lenses of his glasses upon the end of his silk coat. "The chance of enlightening the world upon this subject is one that I would not have missed for a million dollars."

"The dollars for me," murmured Holman. "I don't think the old world cares three cents about anything that happened a thousand years ago in this patch."

The Professor adjusted his glasses and turned them upon the doubter for the space of three minutes, but Holman was blissfully ignorant of the look which the angry archæologist favoured him with. The youngster was watching the firelight upon the face of Miss Barbara Herndon, and his thoughts were probably in a dream-fed future instead of a dismal past.

Leith sat silent and gloomy, his head pillowed against the trunk of a maupei tree, his face in the

shadow of his hat, which he had pulled down over his forehead. The supper had been eaten with little conversation, the Professor being the only one who showed conversational powers of any note. With the notebook already partly filled he felt certain of a niche in the Pantheon of Fame, and he could not resist a desire to prattle childishly about the sensation which his discoveries would cause. It's a terrible thing for a man to get the applause craving in its worst form. It is liable to make him do things which no craving for treasure would allow him to do, no matter how badly he desired the tempting gold.

The girls retired early, and soon afterward Leith wrapped himself up in a blanket and lay down at the foot of the tree. The Professor at last became tired of firing questions at the wonderfully well-informed Soma, and the Kanaka, finding that the market for legends was not as good as it was in the early part of the night, retreated to the other fire, where Kaipi and the fire carriers were slumbering.

The heavy silence that comes in the night to the outposts of the world fell upon the place like a cold hand at that moment. A moon that appeared to have a pellicle across it, like the film upon a dead man's eye, peeped over the barrier of black rocks — peeped over as if it wondered what we were doing in that God-forgotten quarter. Sudden puffs of

wind rustled the leaves of the maupei and fled hurriedly, and from somewhere in the coral rocks one of those red-striped lizards that are sometimes found in the rocky parts of the Carolines sent his unearthly *shik-shuck* into the stillness, where one fancied it a little projectile of sound crushed in its efforts to pierce the tremendous silence of the night. One's imagination pictured the places where there were lights and music, the tinkle of glasses, and the laughter of men and women, and the wilderness suffered in the comparison. Coral atolls with waving palm trees are delightful spots when one reads of them when seated in a comfortable armchair in a snug library, but the real island comes down heavily upon the nerve-centres when night falls upon the spot. Then the fringe dweller feels that he is an outcast from the warm places of the world where men and women meet in social intercourse.

Holman, who had been staring in silence at the fire for some twenty minutes, turned toward me after the Professor had retired.

"Sleepy?" asked the youngster.

"Worse than that," I muttered.

"Let's turn in."

The "turning in" was an easy performance. We lay down on the pile of leaves which the carriers had scraped together, pulled a rug over us, and in spite of the surroundings I was soon fast asleep.

It was Holman's fist that disturbed my slumber. It came with some force against my short rib, and I sat upright. The moonlight made it possible to see across the valley, while every object around the camp was clearly outlined.

Holman was sitting up on his leafy bed, and I put a question breathlessly as I jerked myself upright.

"What's up?"

"Didn't he say that this place was uninhabited?" asked the youngster.

"Yes," I answered. "Why?"

"Well, some one has just pushed his head and shoulders up above that stone table," whispered Holman. "He put his head up, looked across at us for about five minutes, then dodged quickly back."

"You weren't dreaming?"

"Dreaming? Rot! I haven't closed my eyes since we retired!"

I threw off the rug and looked around. Leith lay under the maupei tree in the same position as we had seen him in at the moment I lay down. Near him the Professor snored dismally, probably dreaming dreams of the greatness that would be thrust upon him in the near future. No sounds came from the tent that sheltered the two girls, but a combination of curious nasal sounds rose from the spot where the natives were sleeping around their fire.

"It might be one of the niggers," whispered Holman. "Let us see."

We stole silently across the intervening space, and, crouching in the shadows, counted the sleepers. There were seven. The prowler that Holman had seen upon the top of the stone structure was evidently an outsider, and the knowledge brought no pleasant feelings. Leith had assured the Professor on several occasions that the island was uninhabited, yet it was quite possible that natives from the adjoining groups had visited it during the period that elapsed since his last visit. Yet we felt that it was no stray visitor from another island that had peeped over the top of the massive table, and it was with a suspicious eye upon the sleeping Leith that we crept quietly over the coral rocks toward the tremendous stone piers of the structure that rose like a monster gateway against the gray sky. The atmosphere of that place was indescribable. We seemed to be in the midst of relics that were older than the pyramids. The temple of Luxor may seem impressive by moonlight, but the knowledge we possess of Thebes in its glory somewhat modifies the awe which we would feel if we knew nothing of the people who had raised the great monuments in the city of Amen-Ra. And Holman and I knew nothing of the dead race that erected the mighty stone table on the cleared slope, which by its con-

struction gave evidence of a knowledge of mechanics of which the present-day Polynesian is entirely ignorant. I recalled the Nan-Tauch ruins and the tombs of the mysterious Chan-te-leur kings Ola-Sipa and Ola-Sopa in the Carolines, the *tolmas* and the *langis* of the Marshall and Gilbert groups, and I wished the Professor anything but pleasant dreams. The place seemed waiting for the return of its dead. The scenery possessed that singular expectancy that compels one to turn around every few moments to convince one's self that an unfriendly watcher is not immediately in the rear.

Still keeping in the shadows, we circled the camp till we were in front of the stone table, but just when I took a step into the moonlight space before it, Holman grasped my arm and drew me back.

"Look!" he gurgled. "Look! there he is again!"

All doubts concerning the youngster's previous observations were swept away at that moment. A head and shoulders rose suddenly above the black line of the immense flat stone, remained there for the space of three minutes, then dropped back so that we could not see it from the position in which we stood.

"Take the two front pillars!" whispered Holman. "I'll watch the two back ones. Come on!"

We dashed across the open space, the youngster rushing to the rear, while I ran to the front columns.

It was impossible for any one to descend unless we saw him, and with nerves on a tension we walked around the huge supports and watched anxiously for the midnight watcher to descend.

We must have remained on guard for twenty minutes or more, but there was no sign of the spy. Around us the massive structure cast a patch of velvety shadow, but not the slightest sound came from above.

Holman tired of the inactivity, and stepped across to where I was standing. "I'm going to climb that chestnut tree and see if the beggar is still there," he murmured. "You stop here till I take an observation."

He darted across to the big Pacific chestnut and climbed hurriedly, while I walked round and round the square pillars and strained my ears for the slightest sound that would give a hint that the person on the roof of the mysterious table was preparing to descend.

A low whistle from Holman pierced the silence, and I answered.

"Come up here," he cried softly. "He's given us the slip."

I climbed the tree to the branch where the young fellow sat awaiting me. From his position he had a clear view of the top of the big table, and as I reached him I looked through an open-

ing in the thick leaves. The top of the stone was empty!

"Do you think he slipped down while I was climbing the tree?" asked Holman.

"I'm certain he didn't," I answered. "It would have been impossible."

We stared at the stone in silence. The top was covered with short moss that had gathered there through the centuries, and instead of being flat as we had surmised there was a noticeable slope, so that the part that was directly behind the camp was fully two feet higher than the rear. This was the only peculiarity in its construction, and although we sat in silence, staring at its moss-covered surface, we were utterly unable to put forward the slightest supposition that would account for the disappearance of the watcher. The incident was an extraordinary one. The man could not have dropped from the table before we reached the supporting piers, and we were equally certain that he had not slipped down the pillars while we stood guard beneath.

"I'm going up there," muttered Holman. "We can get the rope from the camp. Come along! I'd like a look at that place at closer quarters."

We climbed hastily down the tree, crept cautiously back to the camp and took the stout rope which we had used in reaching the Ledge of Death. The

camp was quiet. The curious nasal sounds produced by the natives, together with the rather high-toned snore of Professor Herndon, were the only sounds that came through the still night.

Holman flung one end of the rope over a projecting corner of the flat slab, twisted one half of it round and round the pillar to make occasional grips which we could use in the ascent, then clutching the hanging end he worked himself slowly up. I followed him, only to find the upper surface of the table as bare of any signs of life as we had previously noted from our perch in the chestnut tree. The tough moss upon the stone was fully four inches long, and covered the slab completely. In vain we stamped around looking for a possible hiding place. The massive block didn't offer a cranny that a lizard could hide in, and with an unsolved mystery upon our hands we descended to the ground.

"What do you make of it?" asked Holman.

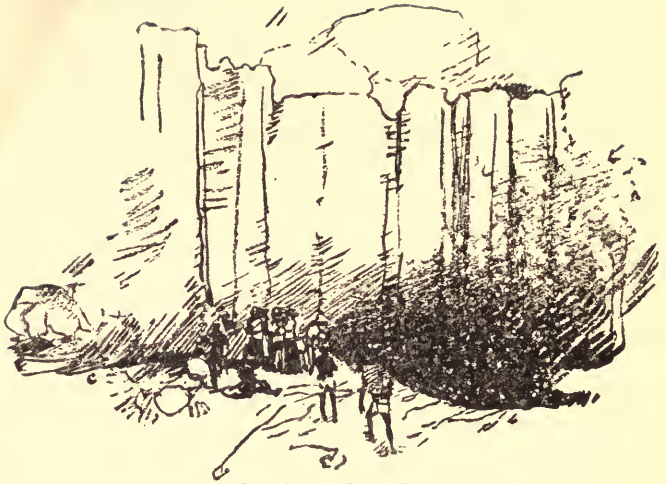
I shook my head. The enigma baffled me. Our suspicions regarding the honesty of Leith made the strange appearance of the figure on the table of stone more perplexing than it would have been under ordinary circumstances. Leith had asserted that the island was uninhabited, yet we were not inclined to rush to him with the news of the discovery. We felt that it was another of the small discoveries that made us pile up suspicions against

the big bully at the head of the party. We had no proof of the midnight visitor, and the story of his sudden disappearance while we watched below would only provoke an unbelieving grin from Leith, and an idiotic laugh from the foolish old Professor.

"Better keep it to ourselves," growled Holman.

"For the present at any rate," I remarked. "If Leith knows that there are others upon the island, and if those others are friendly to him, it will only make him more careful of his actions if we tell what we have seen to-night."

Arriving at this decision we came back to the camp and crawled quietly under the rug, where we watched the mystical monument till the flaming tropical dawn lit up the valley.



CHAPTER XI

KAIPI PERFORMS A SERVICE

THE Professor used a roll of films in snapshotting the stone table while we were breaking camp. He photographed it from every point of the compass, and made a magnificent effort to dislocate his collarbone by falling from a tree up which Holman had urged him to climb so that he could get a view of the upper surface. In his mad pursuit of antiquities the Professor forgot that tree climbing was an accomplishment that he had never mastered properly in the days of his youth, and our departure was somewhat delayed by the shock which he received from the fall. The camera fell upon the pile of leaves which Leith had used as a mattress, and it escaped

with abrasions that were microscopical compared to those received by the Professor, who glared angrily at Holman as Edith Herndon attended to his injuries.

"I thought you could climb," murmured the youngster. "'Pon my word I did. I wouldn't have urged you to get up there if I didn't think you could hang to a limb."

"I am acquainted with a number of persons who would look well hanging to a limb," retorted the Professor, as he rubbed his ankles.

"Same here," said Holman, unperturbed by the sharp retort. "When I think over their actions, Professor, I wonder how they escaped being suspended from such places. Especially when you consider that trees are plentiful."

We made slow progress during the morning. The Professor's accident robbed him of a lot of the nimbleness which had been noticeable during the two preceding days, and the other members of the expedition had to move at a pace that would suit his stiff limbs.

"I'm unlucky," whispered Holman, as he sat beside me at the midday halt. "I tried to show him how he could get a good snapshot, and now he's as poisonous as a red-necked cobra just because he was silly enough to skin his shins."

We crossed the lowest part of the valley during

the early afternoon, and commenced to ascend gradually toward the black walls on the far side. Leith had remarked at the lunch table that we would probably reach our destination on the following morning, and the information brought a thrill of expectation in spite of the suspicions we entertained. The undefined dread had upset our nerves, and I think the two girls, as well as Holman and myself, were looking forward anxiously to the arrival at the objective point so that our suspicions could be either verified or abandoned. Leith was more affable than usual on that afternoon, and he held forth in such a gloomy fashion upon the wonders that were within reach that the Professor almost forgot his injuries and his animus against Holman as he listened to the description.

"It is my opinion that the island was the burial ground of the chiefs of the nearby groups," remarked Leith. "There is every indication that the people who were buried here were not ordinary people, as you will see when you view the wonders that will meet your eyes to-morrow."

The Professor beamed through his thick glasses, and, forgetting his injuries, gave a little jump in negotiating an obstruction, but the look of agony which passed across his face proved that his injured limb objected to useless gambols.

"We may be wrong after all," muttered Holman,

after he had listened to Leith's description of the wonders of the tombs of the long-dead members of Polynesian royal families. "I hate to be suspicious of a fellow, and I'll be glad if he proves genuine in the end."

"So will I," I remarked. "If he measures up all right I'll be half inclined to apologize before I go back to take a gruelling from Captain Newmarch."

It was Kaipi who stampeded the small ray of charity that had pierced the cluster of suspicions we had collected. The little Fijian performed the trick about seven o'clock in the evening, and it was done in a most effective manner. When we had made camp, Leith had sent Soma on ahead with the ostensible purpose of locating the easiest route to the base of the cliffs, and an hour afterward Kaipi managed to attract my attention, and he indicated by signs that he had information to impart. I seized a chance to help him with the small tent which sheltered the two sisters, and as we tugged at the knots he slipped a small piece of paper into my hand.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Soma drop it," he explained nervously. "I follow him just little way think get good chance kill him, but no chance come. He drop little piece of paper from his belt; me pick 'em up. I no know what it say; you read."

I crammed the note into my pocket as Leith approached, but at the first opportunity I dived into a thicket of leaves and opened it with nervous fingers. It was brief, exceedingly brief, but no number of words could have produced the same cold chill of dread which took possession of me as I glanced over the scrawl upon the paper. The note read:

"Five babies for kindergarten. Arrange everything. Meet at the Long Gallery."

I stumbled out on the clearing in a half stupor. The arrival of the long-expected confirmation of our suspicions had the same effect upon me as a blow from a sandbag. Leith was apparently everything that Holman and the girls had suspected him of being, and as I looked around at the nearly impenetrable jungle growth upon which the night had come down with that appalling swiftness of the tropics, I understood the helpless condition in which we were placed. Soma and the other five carriers were evidently tools of the big bully; the person or persons to whom the note was addressed would also stand behind him in a fray, and against this little army there was Holman, Kaipi, the two sisters, and myself. The Professor's insane craving for a sight of the antiquities would probably make him a partisan of the big brute till his devilish tricks were laid sufficiently bare to allow the childish mind

of the scientist to see through them. The situation was pitiful to contemplate, and sick with terror at thoughts of the fate of the two girls, I found Holman and pulled him out of the circle of light thrown by the fire which Kaipi was tending.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I've got proof!" I cried. "Soma dropped a note that Leith sent him off with when we halted. Kaipi found it and brought it to me."

I recited the few words that were now pounding madly through my brain, but the mere recitation would not satisfy Holman. He wanted to see the words — to stare at them, so that his eyes might confirm the information which his ears had gathered, and together we dived deeper into the creepers till it was safe for him to light a match by which he could view the scrawl.

"My God!" he cried hoarsely. "He's a devil, Verslun! We're fools! Infernal fools! Do you hear me? I'll shoot the brute now!"

He flung aside my hands and made a dash toward the fire, plunging through the creepers with a strength born of the sudden flame of temper which had come with the confirmation of Leith's duplicity. The boy's love for Barbara Herndon made him a madman as he raced madly to obtain vengeance from the brute who had led us into the trap.

Like two maniacs we rushed into the light of the

fire, but only the two girls and the Professor were seated round it. Leith was not in sight.

"Where is he?" gasped Holman.

The Professor looked up in mild astonishment. "Who?" he asked.

"Leith!" cried the boy. "Where has he gone?"

"Mr. Leith has gone forward to help Soma," squeaked the Professor. "It will be moonlight, so he took the opportunity of making certain about the direction we were to go in the morning. He said he would not be back before daylight."

Holman mastered his anger, and I beckoned the Professor to one side. It was necessary to make an attempt to convince the foolish old scientist that we were in the hands of a scoundrel, and I determined to place the note and our suspicions before him.

I told hurriedly of the appearance of the figure upon the stone table on the previous evening, but before I had time to tell of the note, the doddering old imbecile interrupted.

"What's that?" he cried. "Some one else upon the island? Well, they can't steal the honour of the discoveries. I have first claim upon everything we find upon the place. Mr. Leith and I made that arrangement before we left Sydney. Besides, it is Mr. Leith's island, and if other scientists are here —

"Oh, confound it! Who said they were scientists?" roared Holman. "It's bad luck for us that they are not. Scientists are harmless, but these are natives or something worse."

"Leith will fix 'em!" cried the Professor, ignoring the youngster's comment on the inoffensive nature of men of his type. "Leith will put them off the place ——"

"Stop chattering and read that!" I interrupted. "Your precious friend sent this ahead by Soma. He dropped it and we got hold of it."

Holman struck a match and held it over the scrap of paper while the scientist stared at it through his thick glasses.

"Well?" he queried. "What has this nonsense to do with me?"

"The five babies," snapped Holman.

"Five babies?" repeated the Professor. "I know nothing about babies!"

His small head wagged backward and forward as he made the statement, and his evident inability to see that the reference concerned us irritated the youngster beyond measure.

"You're the biggest baby of the five!" he roared. "You're a madman! Come away, Verslun; it's no use arguing with him!"

The Professor gave an indignant snort, straightened his small body, as if he contemplated an attack

upon the youngster, then dashed madly back to the fire, where we watched him bobbing his head up and down as he spoke to the two girls. His confidence in the rascal who was possibly luring him to his death was pitiful to see, and we recognized at that moment that it would be useless to waste any further arguments with him.

"We've got to get out of this scrape by our own efforts," muttered Holman. "The girls won't leave him, worse luck. If they would I'd turn tail this minute and make an attempt to fight our way back to the yacht."

"And I doubt if you will find a haven there," I remarked. "That bilious captain was in a great hurry to send word to Leith that I had got safely by his farewell bombardment. We're in for it, old man, and we might as well realize the fact right now."

"You're not sorry I found you on that pile of pearl shell?"

"Sorry?" I cried. "I'm glad, man — I'm infernally glad."

Holman gripped my hand, and then we crawled through the bushes toward the spot where Soma and Leith had started off on their supposed work of exploration.

"What can we do?" I asked.

"Wait round here and pot him when he is coming back," said the youngster cheerfully. "But we

should let the girls know something, shouldn't we? That old fool will tell them a garbled account that will frighten them out of their wits. One of us had better go and try to quiet their fears."

"You go then," I remarked. "I'll wait here till you come back."

Holman crept quietly toward the campfire, and I waited in the undergrowth. The moon was rising in the east and a soft gray light wiped out the intense blackness that had come upon the place after the short twilight. The tops of the cliffs toward which we were journeying were tipped by a brilliant thread of silver as the moon peeped above their ramparts, and I crept deeper into the shadows as the full glory of the glowing orb turned the night into day.

I had waited some thirty minutes for Holman when I noticed a movement beneath a small bush some fifteen paces to my right. I watched the spot without moving, and presently a dark figure crept out of the shelter and moved cautiously toward the camp. Convinced that the visitor was Soma, I pulled out my revolver and waited, wondering as I watched what he intended to do.

The black figure came closer. He paused to listen to the sounds that came from the fire, and as he lifted his head the moonlight fell across his face, and I put the revolver back in my pocket.

"Kaipi," I murmured.

The Fijian crept quietly to the spot where I was hiding.

"I come for you," he muttered.

"Why?"

"Funny things much," he gurgled. "Light on mountain, no see from here. Me watch it, think it something bad. Come, I'll show you."

Holman returned at that moment and I explained what Kaipi had just told me.

"The devil!" muttered the youngster. "The note said that he would meet them at the Long Gallery. See, the light is not visible from our camp, and the brute never thought that one of us would be far enough from the camp to notice it. If it's a signal we might be able to reach the spot and see what is actually going on. If we leave things till to-morrow I'm afraid we'll be too late."

"But the girls?" I cried.

"We'll get back," he replied. "I told them how everything is, Verslun, and they're not afraid. Edith has an automatic pistol that she brought from the yacht, and she'll use it if she is forced to. Come on!"

We followed Kaipi into the shadows, the Fijian picking his way with wonderful instinct through the clumps. At about half a mile from the camp he stopped and pointed to the cliffs.

"Me see light flash way over there," he whispered. "You wait and see."

We crouched down and waited. The minutes passed slowly, but the black barrier away to the east gave no sign of life.

"I think Kaipi must have sighted a star," muttered Holman. "There is nothing ——"

He broke off abruptly and gripped my arm. High up in the basalt barrier, at a spot about three quarters of a mile from where we were crouched, a tiny flame suddenly appeared, blazed for an instant, then died away again. Three times it flared up and as quickly died away, but at the third disappearance Holman and I, with the vengeance-seeking Kaipi, were struggling through the network of damp vegetation toward the spot from which the signal had come.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEVIL DANCERS

THE snaky vines seemed to us to be leagued with Leith as we tried to force our way to the spot where the tiny flash of light had appeared amongst the rocks. The lawyer-vines gripped our ankles and flung us upon our faces scores of times, but we scrambled to our feet and rushed on. Kaipi had made the discovery at an opportune moment. Now that we were certain that Leith contemplated treachery, the wait through the long night would have maddened us. We wanted to meet him quickly, and instinct told us that the appointment place mentioned in the note was identical with the spot to which we were fighting our way.

We were bruised and bleeding when we reached the foot of the black cliffs whose perpendicular walls towered above us. We were almost certain that the light had been flashed from a point immediately above the spot where we came face to face with the barrier, but the scaling of the black barricade was a proposition that seemed incapable of solution as we rushed along the base.

"This is the spot," gasped Holman. "This big tree cluster was just to the right of the place where the light was flashed."

"That's so," I remarked, "but how are we to get up to the point where the signal came from?"

We raced madly up and down the front of the strange black wall, hunting eagerly for a place that offered the slightest foothold by which we could climb to the terraces that we could see far above, but the search was a futile one. The tremendous mountain of ebony rock appeared to have been driven up out of the earth during some volcanic disturbance, and as we stumbled blindly along we thought it would be easier to scale the outside wall of a New York skyscraper than the slippery sides of the obstruction in our path.

It was Holman who found a key to the situation. The big clump of maupei, or Pacific chestnut, that we had taken as a landmark when we were running through the moonlit night, grew close to the barrier,

and the limbs of several of the trees scraped the sides of the basalt columns as the faint night breeze moved them backward and forward.

"There's a ledge up there," whispered the youngster. "Look! It's about fifty feet from the ground. If we could climb a tree we might be able to reach it from one of the limbs."

He had hardly outlined the proposition before we were swarming up the trunk, Holman in the lead by right of discovery, and the nimble Kaipi in the rear. Higher and higher the youngster climbed into the thick green foliage. He reached the topmost branches, and selecting one that led toward the rocky wall, he straddled it and worked his way slowly forward.

Kaipi and I clung to the fork of the limb and waited, and as I watched Holman the wisdom of our actions was assailed by a cold doubt. We had left the two girls entirely unprotected, and if Leith reached the camp before we returned, and heard from the chattering Professor the story of the finding of the scrap of paper, it would be reasonable to suppose that he would consider the moment had arrived for the perpetration of any deviltry he had planned.

But Holman's actions interrupted my mental criticism of the wisdom of our plans. The youngster had reached the extreme end of the limb, and he was

clawing madly at the rock to obtain a footing. He succeeded after a five minutes' struggle, and he sent a breathless whisper back to our perch.

"There's a ledge here," he murmured. "I think we can climb up from it. Hurry along, and I'll give you a hand."

I needed a hand when I reached the end of that leafy seesaw. I was much heavier than the boy, and the limb could hardly support my weight when I neared the end. Holman reached out his hand at a moment when I thought that a drop through the air would be my reward for attempting aerial exhibitions, and the next moment I was beside him on a little projection that barely gave us a footing.

"It's easy climbing just above us," whispered Holman. "Wait till we get Kaipi."

The Fijian came along the limb with the agility of a trapeze artist, and when he reached the ledge we stared up at the dizzy heights that rose above our little resting place. Small jutting projections, like gargoyles, stuck out from the wall, and we looked at them hungrily.

"If we had only brought the rope!" cried the boy. "Say, Verslun, put your face against the rock and I'll climb on to your shoulders."

I did so, and the youngster climbed up cautiously. For a long time he stood there, peering around in an effort to discover a path by which we could go

upward and onward, but at last he stepped off, and I looked up to find him clinging to the wall like a huge beetle. A pack of fat clouds that had harried the moon during the earlier part of the evening now closed in upon her, and we were in complete darkness. The threshing limb of the maupei tree that was within a yard or two of the spot where Kaipi and I stood waiting disappeared in the night, and the scratching of Holman's shoes high above our heads came down to us through the intense silence and proved that he was holding his position with difficulty.

A small piece of shale hit me on the shoulder after a long wait, and I turned my face upward.

"Verslun!" breathed the strained voice of the youngster. "Are you there?"

"Well?" I asked.

"H'sh!" he murmured. "We are right near the spot, Verslun. If Kaipi climbs up on your shoulders to this place I think the two of us could pull you up. Are you willing?"

"Come on, Kaipi," I whispered, and the Fijian climbed nimbly upon me and moved up into the void above.

"Now, Verslun," muttered Holman. "Reach up till we get a grip of your wrists. Are you ready? Well, try hard, man! Think of those two helpless girls and dig your toes in!"

I didn't need any reminder concerning the position of the two sisters as I stood on tiptoe and scratched with my fingers at the crumbling ledge upon which Holman and the Fijian crouched. The predicament of Edith Herndon, and not fears for my own safety, made me scratch madly for a foothold as I swung above the shelf I left. Kaipi and Holman tugged till every muscle in my arms shrieked out against the way they were being handled. But I was going up. I "chinned" the crumbling layer of rock upon which my fingers had a perilous grip, laid my chest across the shelf and wriggled into safety.

"That's good," whispered Holman. "Don't puff so hard, man! We're too close to take any chances."

I got upon my hands and knees and followed him along the narrow pathway. Over a thousand obstructions we crawled like three rock snakes, till finally the boy halted and turned toward me.

"See the streak of light through that split in the rock?" he whispered. "Look in front of you! Well, they're inside."

The split in the rock to which Holman had pointed was a perpendicular crevice about four feet in length, but possessing only a width of six inches. It separated two rock masses that were fully eighteen inches thick, and as we wriggled noiselessly toward it we saw that it gave us a glimpse of the interior of

a huge cavern, the part of which that was just inside our point of observation being illuminated by a swinging ship's lamp which hung by a rope that dropped from the vaulted dome.

The lamp swung directly in front of the crevice through which we peered breathlessly, and for a few seconds it was the only object that was visible. Gradually our eyes became accustomed to the light, and we found that a pair of brown legs were moving slowly along the floor past our spyhole. A body, gorgeously decorated in mats of green and crimson parrot feathers, followed the legs, and then came a head that was hidden behind a mask of sennet daubed thickly with coral lime and ochre till it appeared a ghastly nightmare.

The horror moved upon its stomach, and, viewing it as we did through the narrow cranny, it appeared as if the film of a biograph was being slowly dragged before our eyes. Another pair of legs followed the masked head, another body, and another mask that was even more fear-inspiring than the first. And the procession continued. Three, four, five, and six — each succeeding one being arrayed in a mask of more ghastly appearance than those which had preceded him. The sixth was followed by the first, who had wriggled clear around the circle of light thrown by the lamp, and in perfect silence the infernal snaky circle moved backward round and

round, the faint light shining on bare legs, on bodies from which the parrot mats were thrust aside by the contortions, and upon the masks that were weirdly fantastic and Mephistophelian.

They had circled the floor about ten times when Holman tugged my coat and I wriggled back from the crevice.

"What's up?" My lips were dry as I put the question.

"Kaipi."

"Where is he?"

"Cleared out. Those human serpents scared him. Go softly, man! We must get him before he attempts to go down that cliff or he'll break his thick head."

We caught up to the deserter on the ledge to which Holman and the Fijian had dragged me a short time before, and the youngster abused the frightened native as he endeavoured to turn him back

"No, no!" shrieked the Fijian. "Me no see dance like that. Me die if I stay."

"Why?" I asked.

"It is 'tivo' — death dance," gasped Kaipi. "Wizard men dance it. Something going happen, damn bad."

"But they can't get you," cried Holman. "Come back and watch them. Soma and Leith will be there directly, and you'll get your revenge."

But Kaipi would have nothing more of the performance in the rocky chamber. The repulsive masks and the backward wriggling of the six upon the floor had upset his fighting stomach for the time being, and we could not induce him to return.

"Well, you wait here," ordered Holman. "We're going back, but we'll return in a few hours and pick you up. Don't move from this ledge."

Kaipi would promise anything if he was not forced to witness the performance, and we left him huddled up in the darkness, and returned to the spyhole in the wall.

The "tivo," as the Fijian called it, was still in progress. Without noise, the six half-nude figures were describing circles upon the smooth floor. The silence and the serpentlike motions had a peculiar hypnotic effect upon us, and in a sort of dreamlike trance we watched them wriggle by the narrow aperture to which we pressed our faces. With each circle more of the brown, sweat-polished bodies showed beneath the twisted mats. The pace was beginning to tell upon them now. Slower and slower they moved past the crevice, till at last all movement ceased, and, apparently lifeless, they lay face downward upon the floor.

I thought of the two girls at the lonely camp as we sat watching, and I knew well that Holman's thoughts were turned in the same direction. We

had seen nothing of Leith, but an intuition that would not be put aside connected Leith with the strange ceremony that was in progress within the cavern, and we were chained to the spot.

I have no idea how long the six figures remained motionless upon the floor. It may have been an hour, it may have been two. The mystery of the performance we were witnessing seemed to drag us into a world where minutes and hours did not exist. We were dumfounded by the confirmation of our suspicions and the peculiarly devilish exhibition, and I shook off the lethargy with an effort as Holman prodded me with his finger and pointed at a spot beyond the body of the dancer who lay immediately in front of the spyhole.

Looking in the direction Holman pointed I saw that another light was approaching through the gloom of the cavern. It bobbed toward us slowly, a tiny pin point that came nearer and nearer as the bearer walked in the direction of the six. The distance it was away from the dancers, which was evident from the time that elapsed from the moment we saw it till it was close up, convinced us that the cavern was of an enormous length, and the words "Long Gallery" in the note which Soma had dropped came up before my mind. There was no doubt that the cave was the meeting spot which Leith had mentioned, and as I felt Holman's body stiffen

as he shouldered against me for a share of the peephole, I knew that he believed that the treacherous brute was one of the three that were approaching behind the bobbing lamp.

The bodies of the dancers, or at least the parts that we could see, became tense and rigid. A soft hiss went round the circle, and once again the wriggling movement started. But this time the six went forward instead of backward. They broke out of the circular formation, and in a long glistening line moved up the cavern toward the three approaching. The lamp halted, then it was raised high in the air as the crawling half dozen approached, and Holman gave a curious little gurgle as the light fell upon the three newcomers. Wrapped in parrot feathers and a white mask, the lamp bearer stood revealed as Soma. Immediately behind him was a tall white man in the same outlandish garb, while the last of the three, barearmed and barelegged, and wearing an immense headdress of plumes, was Leith!

The snaky six circled the three at a respectful distance, then, again breaking into a single file formation, they turned toward the end of the cave nearest our spyhole, and behind the length of creeping bodies, Soma, the tall white who had only one eye, and Leith came slowly.

Holman's breath came faster as the procession

approached. The exhibition chilled us. There was a devilish suggestiveness in the proceeding. In some indescribable manner it brought up mental pictures that were nauseating, and it required something of an effort to watch the performance. The mystery of the silent night, the thoughts of the danger which threatened the two girls, and the glimpses of the astounding performance within the cavern brought a dazed mental condition that made us doubt our sanity.

I felt Holman's hand reach out across my shoulder as the procession moved down upon us, and instinctively I understood the movement. The cold barrel of a revolver had slipped by my face, and I gripped his wrist and forced the hand downward. The manner in which Soma and the one-eyed man walked in front of the big brute made it impossible to shoot with telling effect, and Leith was the person we desired to kill at that moment. The others seemed to be but creatures of his will, and he stood up in our minds as a devil whose existence was a menace to everything that was pure and clean.

The three newcomers moved to the side of the cavern, so that nothing except their bare feet were visible, and backward and forward in front of those feet moved the human serpents with a regularity that was stupefying. In an unbroken line they would move forward, flatten themselves upon the

floor, then, with a unanimity that was remarkable, they would wriggle backward, to repeat the same movement over again.

Holman pulled me away at last, and we retired to a point that made it possible for us to converse in low whispers without being heard.

"What will we do?" he gasped. "I can't stay there any longer! I want to get inside to the devil! I don't want to shoot him; I want to throttle him with my two hands!"

"But the entrance to the cavern is from somewhere on the other side of the hill," I remonstrated, as the young fellow raved about our helplessness.

"We must get there!"

"Don't lose your head about it," I remarked. "Keep cool and we'll win out in the long run."

It was useless to speak of patience to that boy at the moment. He clawed desperately at the slippery wall in an endeavour to find a path that would lead us to the opening on the other side by which Leith had made his entry, but the attempt appeared to be madness. A dozen times the youngster scrambled up rough portions that offered a slight footing, but each time he slipped back bruised and battered. He would listen to no arguments. The desire to get to the mouth of the cavern, and kill Leith before the morning, had produced an insanity, and we crawled and climbed along the face of those basalt

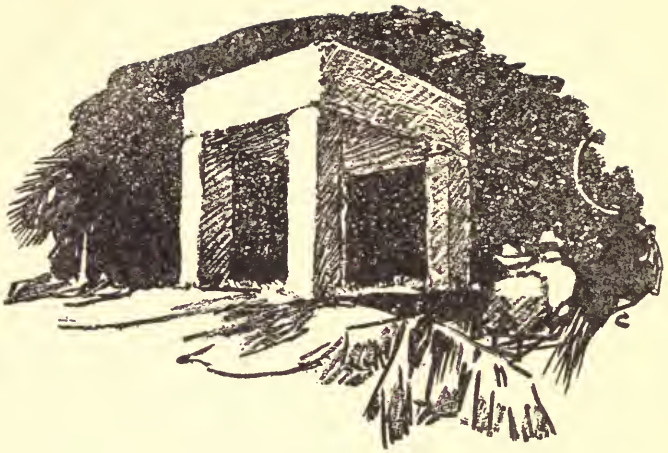
cliffs in a manner that chilled my spinal marrow. Holman possessed the courage of a maniac. His imagination was blinded to the dangers that lay alongside the crumbling shelves of rock, and I scrambled behind him wondering dimly what would happen to Edith and her sister if an unkind fate flung us from the ledge into the darkness from which the soft croon of the chestnut clumps came up like a warning against our foolhardiness.

Holman paused at the end of a wearisome climb, and he drew himself upright. At that moment the cloud-harried moon dragged herself from beneath the pack, and the young fellow gave a cry of joy.

"We can do it from here, Verslun," he cried. "I see a path to the top. Come along, man!"

"What about Kaipi?" I gasped. "We'll never find our way back here."

"Let him sit there," he snorted. "Hurry or the moon will be under the clouds before we cross the cliff."



CHAPTER XIII

TOMBS OF SILENCE

FOR my own part I found no great liking for the moonlight. Up to that moment I had followed blindly in the tracks of Holman, nerved somewhat by the thought that the trail he passed over would carry me. The dangers were hidden by the darkness, and my imagination was too stunned by the happenings of the night to make any endeavour to torture my nerves by picturing them.

But the reappearance of the moon brought an opportunity to my eyes, and I wondered if we could negotiate the goat track which the youngster was scrambling over. I turned my face to the wall and

crawled timorously in the rear. Higher and higher we went with bleeding fingers and knees, but at last Holman reached the top, and I dragged myself up beside him.

"Get up!" he cried savagely. "We must kill the devil before morning."

We got to our feet and started to run toward what we knew to be the direction of the cavern. The ground sloped gradually, and we reasoned that it would continue to fall away till we reached the mouth of the cavern by which Leith had entered from the far side. For once we had a clear run. At that height there was little vegetation, and at a mad gait we sped across a bare stretch where the only obstacles were lumps of rock that were scattered around in great profusion.

"If — if we could find the place and block the devil and all his gang inside," gasped Holman.

"That's too good a thing to entertain," I spluttered.

"We might, Verslun! We might!" he cried. "I've got a feeling that we've been picked to put that devil out of existence. That's why I'm taking a chance in leaving the girls back there at the camp. I believe I'm going to kill him, but whether it is to-night or some other time I don't know."

"The sooner the better," I stammered. "From what Kaipi said about that dance, something out

of the way is going to happen, and I've got a hunch that the something will happen to us."

Holman remained silent, and we raced on, moving down the slope at an angle that we judged would bring us somewhere near the entrance. At moments my brain assured me that it was a mad proceeding, but something of the certainty with which the youngster looked upon himself as the Fate-appointed destroyer of Leith came to me as I raced beside him, and I put aside the fears for Edith Herndon's safety that besieged me as I ran. The last doubt about Leith's treachery had been chased away by the dance we had witnessed, and I felt assured that the man was a monster, a vile thing, who, for some purpose that I could not allow myself to ponder over, had brought the foolish old scientist and his daughters into a place of terrors. Treachery had been apparent from the start. It was only the confidence of the old antiquarian that had blinded our eyes to a score of incidents that should have convinced us that the brute had some ulterior motive in view. During that mad race through the night the big sallow-faced giant appeared to us as a devil, a fiend that was connected with some sort of horrible practices that had continued to exist in this remote islet long after all trace of such things had been lost in those islands that were visited by traders and missionaries. Kaipi connected the dance with

death, and the same conclusion had come to us before we had heard the words of the frightened Fijian.

Holman slackened speed, and we dodged through a mass of boulders that we judged were in a direct line with the crevice through which we had witnessed the happenings in the cave.

"We should be near the place if there is an entrance to it on this side," he muttered. "This pile of rocks looks from — oh, Gee! here's a path!"

It was a path, sure enough. It wound in and out among the rocks, a narrow beaten trail, singularly white against the black surroundings.

Holman stopped and took up a handful of the dust. "They coat it with coral lime to make it plain in the darkness," he growled. "Come on, Verslun, the wriggly batch must be straight ahead."

I pulled the army Colt from my pocket and ran softly abreast of the youngster. The corrosive terror of the earlier part of the evening had fled then, and my nerves had taken up a sort of dare-devil attitude toward all happenings that the future might hold in store. Besides, the more I thought of Leith, the greater his villainy appeared to be, and to save Edith Herndon from the slightest contact with the ugly ruffian was a task that would give the greatest coward in the world the courage of a warrior.

The white path wound in and out of the boulders,

which became thicker as we advanced, and suddenly it dived through a dark passage into the side of the hill. We felt that we were at the mouth of the burrow by which Leith and his dancers had entered, and we moved into the shadow to reconnoitre. Leith had informed the Professor that he would not return to the camp till the following morning, so the chances were that the treacherous scoundrel was still assisting at the ceremonies that we had witnessed.

"Shall we go in?" whispered Holman.

"As you like," I answered.

He moved toward the mouth of the burrow, then stopped and turned toward me. "What time is it?"

"It's ten minutes of midnight," I replied.

"We've got six hours," he whispered. "Come along, we'll chance it."

Very cautiously we moved into the darkness of the passageway, feeling our way along the walls that were cold and damp from the moisture which had soaked through from the crown of the cliff. The place was not more than five feet wide, and as I walked along on one side of the wall, Holman, feeling his way along the other, could touch me whenever he wished to ascertain my position. Our shoes made no sound upon the floor of the corridor. It was covered deep with fine dust, upon which we walked noiselessly.

An occasional bat fluttered past us, but outside the flapping of the wings not a sound disturbed the stillness of the place. The silence of the outside was intensified a hundredfold. In the open, one heard the crooning of the trees as the soft winds from the Pacific played with their heavy foliage, but in the natural passage through which we crawled in search of Leith the air felt as if it had not been disturbed for centuries. It was heavy and thick, possessing a faint odour that seemed to rise from the dust beneath our feet.

We had walked about one hundred yards along the corridor when it widened suddenly. The walls that we were following turned off at right angles, and from the moonlight which filtered through a dozen small fissures high up above our heads we saw that we had entered a cavern of vast proportions. We sensed its vastness. The few streaks of moonlight that stabbed the darkness were like so many guide-posts that enabled us to make a mental calculation of the height and extent of the place.

We stopped and moved together instinctively. Holman put his mouth close to my ear.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"It might be a cavern leading into the one that runs out to the face of the cliff," I replied.

"But how are we to cross it?"

"I can't tell you. I'm afraid if we leave this opening that we'll get lost."

It was rather plain that we would. The surrounding walls were as black as the opening by which we had entered the place, and we stood with quick-beating hearts staring out across the place through which the bars of moonlight appeared like silver skewers.

One of these skewers fell upon a ledge of stone some few yards in front of the spot where we were standing, and Holman stepped toward it.

"Stay where you are," he said. "If I get lost I'll whistle softly and you can signal back to me."

He moved away and I was left standing in the opening. A bat banged heavily against my face, and the odour from the dusty floor irritated my nostrils so that I had difficulty in restraining myself from sneezing.

It was about twenty minutes before Holman returned. He whistled ever so softly, and when I replied he came toward me hurriedly.

"Just walk out to that spot of moonlight," he whispered. "I'll keep guard on the door. Feel around there and tell me what you think of it."

I did as he directed. I walked forward to the spot and felt around with my hands. My fingers came in contact with round, smooth objects that filled every available inch of a stone table in front

of me, and with a feeling of revulsion I hurried back to the mouth of the corridor. Holman gripped my arm and put a question.

"Gave you a shock, eh?"

"Why, they're skulls!" I breathed hoarsely.

"Yes, hundreds of 'em," he said. "The place is chock full of them. This island must have been the burying ground of all the adjoining groups, and it's the atmosphere of the place that keeps the niggers away from it. Leith has been wise to that. The present generation of islanders know nothing of the things that happened here hundreds of years back, but they've got an inborn horror of the place, and they keep away."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"Wait here."

"But if he doesn't come this way?"

"He must," he answered. "It's the only way out, I think. We can't go across this wilderness, so it's safer to await developments here."

We hadn't long to wait. From a point directly opposite our position, and at a distance that we judged to be two hundred yards away, a bobbing light broke into the wall of darkness and moved directly toward us. Holman gripped my arm and pulled me forward to the stone tables upon which the skulls were laid, and side by side we crouched and waited.

It was the ship's lantern that Soma had carried in front of Leith that was now moving upon us. Its yellow light showed the parrot-feather mat and headdress of the big Kanaka, while the hum of voices, which drifted across the vast space of the cavern, informed us that the dancers who had assisted at the ceremony were returning with Leith and the one-eyed white man.

Holman's breath came hot upon my cheek. There was no necessity for speech. I knew that he intended to seize the first opportunity to attack, and that opportunity was at hand. Behind the bobbing lamp that was approaching us by an irregular trail, as if Soma was winding in and out amidst stone supports similar to the one that sheltered us, was the brute who held us in his grip, and after the events we had witnessed it seemed impossible to reconcile his actions with anything that smacked of decency or honesty.

I attempted to drop on my knees at that minute, but the moment was disastrous to the ambush which we had planned. As I moved my hand forward I dislodged a skull that was evidently resting upon a shelf somewhat higher than the one before us. With a noise that appeared terrific in that place, the object crashed down upon the stone, and the bobbing lantern halted about fifteen paces in front of us.

"Behind the bobbing lamp was the brute who held us in his grip."

Leith broke the silence that followed. "What was that?" he asked.

"A bat," answered Soma.

"I don't think so," droned Leith. "Lift up the light."

Soma raised the lantern high above his head, and as he did so Holman fired.

The echoes were terrific. High in the vaulted roof of the place echoes answered each other with the sharp reports of Maxims, and the thick air shivered.

Leith's voice roared an order. "Put out the light!"

Soma immediately crashed the lantern upon the ground, and I heard Holman groan.

"I missed him!" he whispered. "Move along a little, Verslun; they've got a line on our position."

We didn't move a minute too soon. Half a dozen shots broke out from the spot where the light of the lantern had been suddenly quenched, and we fired twice and shifted ground the moment we pulled the triggers.

But the opposition guessed the direction of our sidestep. A bullet lifted my hat into the darkness, and, as I scrambled away, a hand touched my thigh and was immediately taken away.

I felt Holman's body on the other side, and then, clubbing the big Colt, I drove it down through the

darkness at a point that my imagination suggested would be the most likely place to find the head of the stranger whose hand touched my thigh. The blow missed, and as I made a kangaroo-like jump sideways, a spurt of flame blazed out within a yard of my face.

I fired immediately, and the soft *plop* of a body settling into the dry dust upon the floor convinced me that I had settled one of our enemies.

For about ten minutes after that there was no more firing. My skin, more than my ears, brought to my brain the information that there were others somewhere in the thick darkness, but the little air tremors that came to me were so faint that it was impossible to tell in which direction they were. I had lost all trace of Holman. With extreme caution I crawled toward what I thought to be the spot where I had left him, but my groping fingers found only the fragments of bone that covered the dusty floor of the charnel house.

I sat in the dust and endeavoured to make my addled brains direct me as to the best course to pursue. The silence led me to infer that Leith and his party, who were evidently familiar with the cave, were making for the passage by which we had entered the place, and a cold chill passed over me as my imagination pictured Leith, One Eye, and the oily dancers waiting for Holman and me in the nar-

row corridor. To escape from the place immediately was our only chance, and with a courage born of terror conjured up by the thoughts of imprisonment in that place of skulls, I started to crawl rapidly into the dark.

I had not proceeded half a dozen yards when my hand touched a bare leg, and I drew back hastily. With madly pounding heart I crouched in the dust, waiting for an attack, but as I waited I convinced myself that the leg had not been drawn back when my fingers encountered it. With my right hand clubbing my revolver, I reached my left out cautiously, and once again my fingers came in contact with the bare limb. The fear left me at that moment. I was back at the spot where I had fired at an unseen foe some fifteen minutes before, and the body near me was the victim of my lucky bullet.

Carefully I felt the dead man. He wore a large feather cloak and a tall headdress, and I concluded that he was one of the wriggling brutes whose performance we had watched in the cave. In the dust, beside the body, my fingers found his revolver, and the fact that he had been armed at the moment his party came unexpectedly upon us was more proof, if proof were needed, that Leith's tactics were anything but straightforward.

Securing the revolver, I started to crawl away, but a sudden inspiration came to me. I stripped

the parrot-feather mat and the headdress from the corpse and donned them over my own clothing. In the darkness recognition was made through the fingers, and as there were eight enemies in the cavern and only one friend, I considered that the danger I ran of receiving a bullet from Holman was more than counterbalanced by the protection that the dancer's costume would give me if I ran against the groping hands of Leith or his gang.

After a wearisome crawl I touched the wall of the cavern, and standing upright I debated for a moment whether I should move to the right or the left. I had no definite idea as to the position of the opening through which we had entered the place, and I dreaded the weary circuit of the cavern which I would be compelled to make if I turned in the wrong direction. It was possible that the corridor was within a few yards of me, and if I turned away from it I might get lost in other passages leading to the long gallery where the dance of death had taken place.

I decided to move to the right, and with one hand upon the cold wall I stumbled forward. If Holman was still a prisoner, Edith Herndon and her sister were entirely unprotected, and my tormenting imagination made me throw prudence to the winds. I had to reach the camp before Leith or any of his

evil bodyguard arrived, and, becoming reckless of the terrors of the dark, I ran blindly in my desperate desire to find the path into the open air.

I cannoned into a man who was standing with his back to the wall of the cave, and before I could lift my arm his fingers had gripped my throat. For a second we struggled, then he released his grip and murmured some words in a dialect that I did not understand. His hand had touched the parrot-feather mat that I had drawn about my shoulders, and he was convinced that I was one of his own companions.

Still holding my shoulder he pushed me a pace or two forward, and instinctively I knew that I was in the corridor. The faintest tremor disturbed the heavy air, and a wild surge of joy rushed through my being. The place of skulls had brought a terror upon me that swept away my reason, but the knowledge that I was on the way to the open, where I could fill my lungs with God's pure air, acted as a powerful restorative.

As my guide's fingers slipped from my shoulder, I stood still and listened. His heavy breathing was distinctly audible, and with a prayer to Providence to guide my right hand, I brought the butt of the heavy revolver down through the darkness. It must have caught him squarely upon the crown, for he dropped without a groan.

"Holman!" I shrieked. "Where are you, Holman? The passage is here! This way, quick!"

A revolver cracked within two feet of me, and the bullet ripped through the tall headdress. I crouched quickly and ran along the corridor. There was no answering cry from Holman, and although it was possible that he would not disclose his whereabouts by replying to my yell, I decided that I could do little to help him in the impenetrable darkness. Besides, Edith Herndon and her sister were in danger, and the dawn was coming rapidly. Throwing off the parrot-feather mat, which had served me to such good purpose, I raced headlong toward the opening. A few bats, returning early to their sleeping quarters, banged against my face, but the way was otherwise clear, and with a cry of joy I rushed through the mouth of the passage into the calm, clear night.

CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO THE CAMP

THE path, with its coating of coral lime, stretched before me, and I fled along it. The moon had disappeared behind the hills, but the limed track was quite distinct. My watch had stopped, but I judged that there was still a good two hours before the dawn, and I ran as I had never run in my life. I recognized what sort of feeling I possessed for Edith Herndon as I raced through the lonely night, and I reproached myself bitterly for leaving the camp. I became convinced that Leith had set out for the resting place of the Professor and his two daughters after placing guards at the inner opening of the corridor to see that Holman and I did not escape from the

cavern, and I realized the terror which the two girls would experience when the big brute reached the camp.

"The devil!" I muttered. "The fiendish brute!"

A chuckle came from a boulder beside the track, and Holman's cheery voice set my pulses beating.

"You frightened the dickens out of me, Verslun," he cried. "I thought you were one of the evil legion. Gee! I'm glad to see you."

"How did you get out?" I gasped as we rushed on together. "I thought I left you in the cavern."

"It was a good job you didn't," he retorted. "There was a husky nigger at the outside entrance of the passage, and he gave me the fight of my life. Get off this track; they might be after us at any moment."

"Do you think that Leith has made for the camp?" I asked.

"I suppose he has. We must move as fast as we can, Verslun. If he reaches there before us we'll deserve any fate that will come to us. We shouldn't have left them."

The utterance of the conviction that had come to both of us brought a silence, and we rushed across the boulder-strewn ground that we had crossed earlier in the night. We felt certain that Leith knew of a surer and safer path back to the camp, but it was useless for us to hunt for a new trail at that moment.

We would have to find our way down the nearly perpendicular wall up which we had climbed after leaving the crevice through which we had viewed the death dance, and, to me at least, the recollections of that path brought feelings that were by no means pleasant. But Leith was making toward the camp, and the horrible thoughts aroused by the spectacle which we had witnessed in the early night muzzled the thrills which the dangers of the climb sent through our bodies. The dance had terrified the Fijian by arousing thoughts of the deeds that would happen in its wake, and Kaipi's terror became a gauge for us to measure its dread significance.

We reached the cliffs and ran up and down the ledge in a vain search for the spot where we had clawed our way to the top. Not that we thought the finding of the place would solve the problem of the descent. It was hard to conceive of a more difficult way than the one by which we had come, and as if he had suddenly come to the conclusion that any other path would be preferable, Holman dropped upon his knees and lowered himself upon a ledge that was immediately below.

"Come on, Verslun!" he cried, in a choked voice that was altogether different from his cheery tones. "If there is no path we must roll down. There's the first flush of the dawn!"

I looked toward the east and groaned. The faint

grayish tint unnerved me. Although it was possible that Leith had already reached the camp, still we had promised the two girls that we would return by daylight, and although we had a hazy notion as to what we would do when we did reach their side, the longing to get there made us oblivious of danger. I swung down on to the crumbling foothold that supported Holman, and breathlessly we began to scramble toward the valley.

It was a mad climb. Holman exhibited a temerity that bordered on insanity. With reckless daring he scrambled down upon dangerous niches that jutted out upon the face of the cliff, and my repeated warnings fell upon deaf ears. A task that would have appeared impossible when viewed in daylight, lost half of its terrors because we only vaguely apprehended the dangers that threatened us when a layer of shale crumbled beneath our feet. Our descent became a wild toboggan. Slipping and sliding, clutching wildly at every little projection that would decrease the speed at which we were travelling, we rolled with bruised and bleeding bodies on to a small platform, and lay half stunned for a moment, as a thousand pieces of rock, dislodged by our bodies, bounced past us into the valley.

Holman picked himself up and looked around. The pink flush had deepened in the east, and nearby objects were discernible.

"By all the gods! we are back on the ledge near the crevice!" he cried. "Come along and we'll hunt for Kaipi."

It was wonderful how we had pulled up in our slide near the place where we had witnessed the performance that prompted us to make the ascent. But there was no mistake about the spot. As we crawled along the platform we found that we had landed not more than twenty feet from the crevice through which we had witnessed the bloodcurdling "tivo," and we hurried toward the spot where we had left the Fijian, whose nerves had been upset by the glimpse he had had of the strange antics of the dancers.

But Kaipi was not at the spot where we had left him. Whether his fears had increased to such an extent that they had forced him to leave the place, or whether he had come to the conclusion that we had returned to the camp by some other route, we could not determine; so wasting no time on useless conjecture we hurried toward the big maupei tree up which we had climbed to reach the ledge.

But Holman's hurry proved disastrous. He had escaped the dangers of the cliff descent to meet an accident when he had sufficient light to see what he was about. In reaching for the limb of the tree that threshed against the cliff, he lost his footing, and before I could grip him he went crashing

through the foliage to the ground, some fifty feet below!

I thought that I was an hour descending that tree, but I could not have been more than three minutes if my skinned legs could be relied upon as evidence of speed. I found Holman in a thorny tangle, and as I dragged him into the open he groaned loudly and endeavoured to get upon his feet.

"Are you hurt?" I questioned.

"No, no!" he cried. "I'm not hurt, Verslun. Get me on my feet, man. Quick! For the love of God, quick!"

I gripped his shoulders and he managed to stand upright. The dawn came with tropic suddenness at that moment, and I saw that he was bleeding from a nasty wound above the right temple, while he limped painfully as I helped him across a small cleared patch near the tree.

"I've hurt my leg," he cried, "but I'm going to get to the camp. If I fall, Verslun, I want you to lend me a hand. Promise to help me, will you? She — Miss Barbara, you know, old man. She is everything to me. Give me a hand if I tumble down."

"I promise," I answered, and he wrung my hand as we started off through the clawing, scratching vines that tripped us up as we tried to fight our way forward.

If we had thought on the night before that the

quarter mile of country that lay between the camp and the rocky wall was a difficult stretch to negotiate, we were more than doubly certain of its impenetrable character now that daylight had come. How we had ever managed to get through it in the darkness was a mystery that we tried to solve as we attempted to make our way back. The place was a mad riot of thorny undergrowth, laced and bound with vines that were as strong as wire hawsers. The lianas appeared human to us; they lassoed our legs and flung us sprawling upon our faces whenever we tried to quicken our speed. Thorns of a strange fishhook variety drove their barbed points into us, and each yard of the tortuous path that we cut through the devilish vines was marked by a scrap of our clothing, which the tormenting thorns seemed to wave aloft as an emblem of victory.

"He'll beat us!" gasped Holman. "I'm all in, Verslun; that fall has finished me."

"Keep at it!" I said. "We must be near the camp by now."

"We've walked three miles," muttered Holman. "We've lost our way."

"No, we haven't!" I cried. "We've struck a bad patch, but we'll get there soon."

The youngster clenched his teeth and endeavoured to forget the agony of his leg, but the effort taxed his courage.

"We'll do it," I said. "Don't let the brute beat us."

"I — I won't!" he stammered. "If it was anything but my leg! Verslun!"

He fell on his face, and I helped him up, but once again he collapsed. The injured limb made it impossible for him to stand or even crawl.

"You get ahead," he cried hoarsely. "Leave me, Verslun! Leave me here!"

"But I'd never find you again," I protested.

"Yes, you would! I'll crawl out after a few hours' rest. Run to the camp, and shoot — shoot the devil the moment you put your eyes on him!"

I took a quick glance at the matted walls of the green creepers that hedged us in on all sides. Holman was in the last stages of exhaustion, and I reasoned quickly. If I left him in the middle of the thorny tangle that encompassed us, it would be utterly impossible for me to find him again, and he would probably perish from thirst. If I rushed away I would be leaving him to certain death, and although our prospects of leaving the island alive did not look too bright at that moment, I considered that I would be making his demise a certainty by leaving him in the maze.

I stopped, gripped him round the waist, and with a great effort managed to lift him upon my shoulder. Holman's actions did not help me as I struggled

beneath him. He kicked like a madman when he understood what I intended to do, but I held him in spite of his protests.

"Leave me here!" he screamed. "Go ahead by yourself, Verslun! What's the use of taking me?"

"You're coming, so you can stop kicking," I muttered. "Take your fingers out of my eyes."

But Holman's struggles ceased then, and his head fell backward. The pain of his leg had made the plucky youngster swoon away, and with a prayer upon my lips I sprang again at the bulwark of vicious creepers.

I have a very vague recollection of the remainder of that trip. In my subconscious mind I have memories of an insane struggle with a jungle that was alive, of a fight with thorny creepers that pursued us. I became convinced that those vines were alive, because the same thorns that we had passed hours before rose up again in our path and waved the scraps of bloody clothing that they had torn from Holman and myself.

At last, half insane with anxiety for the safety of the girls and our own struggles, we staggered blindly into the patch of cleared land upon which the camp had been pitched on the previous evening. It was impossible to mistake the site. The embers of the big fire were still smoking and we stared with sweat-blinded eyes at the place where the girls'

tent had been standing when we rushed off with Kaipi to investigate the light in the hills. But there was no trace of the girls or the Professor. Leith had got ahead of us, and the big brute had rushed the crazy scientist and his two daughters toward the hills that stood up black and defiant above the sea of green vegetation.

CHAPTER XV

A DAY OF SKIRMISHING

WE LAY for a few moments upon the soft grass, then Holman crawled on hand and knees to the little spring of cold water and bathed the wound upon his temple and his injured leg. The water revived him, and after a brief rest he got to his feet and stared at the festooned trees that surrounded the spot.

"I'm ready, Verslun," he muttered. "Which way did they go?"

I pointed to the marks made in the soft ground by the shoes of the two girls, and Holman limped forward.

"But we can't follow this fashion," I protested.

"Why not?"

"We'll be shot down before we get within half a mile of them. Leith cannot know that we have escaped from the cavern or he would have left some one here to interview us."

"Well, we can't do any high-class tracking in this country," said the youngster grimly. "If we stray six feet from the trail we are lost. We had better trust to fortune and go ahead."

It was impossible to do anything else. The route by which the carriers had marched from the camping ground was perfectly clear while we followed their footsteps, but if we diverged ever so slightly the thick veils of verdure hid the path from our eyes. To follow the party we would have to hold to the trail and take the chances of an ambush which Leith would certainly prepare for us the moment he knew we had escaped from the Cavern of Skulls. It would be easy for him to set his one-eyed white partner to shoot us down as we staggered along the trail which Soma or one of the carriers had blazed with an axe.

"They cannot have more than three hours' start of us," cried Holman. "Give me your arm, Verslun. Now let us move as fast as we can."

"But this is puerile," I protested. "We'll be running our heads into the noose."

"I don't care if we do. I want to get near Leith."

"But we'll never get near by running after him

in this fashion. If we could find some way to get in front of him and wait."

"But what will happen to the girls?"

"Will our death prevent it?" I snapped. "If we rush after him in the open we'll throw our chances away."

I am a sailor, absolutely ignorant of jungle knowledge, but I had sense enough to know that Leith would not leave his rear exposed for a moment after he had received word from the cave. I tried to recall stories of extraordinary trailing feats as we stumbled forward, but I became convinced that all the marvellous performances I had ever read of had been accomplished under conditions that were altogether different from those that confronted us upon the Isle of Tears. An open piece of country would have been a sight of joy to our eyes that were weary of the everlasting mesh of green which encompassed us like the tentacles of a malignant fate. The green, sweaty leaves, the fat, bloated pods, and the lengths of pythonesque runners produced a mental nausea. The vegetation appeared to us to be vicious. Its very luxuriance produced that fear of the wild which grips one in tropical countries but which is never felt in lands situated in the temperate zones.

We had not covered a hundred yards of the path when Holman pounced upon a strip of white bark

that waved to us from the thorn of a lawyer-vine crossing the track. A few pencilled words covered the smooth side of the strip, and we absorbed them in a single glance.

" 'We're prisoners now,' muttered Holman, reading the few words in a whisper. 'The brute has declared himself. Barbara.' "

The boy turned to me, his face all blood-smeared and haggard, and for a moment we stared at the strip of bark. There had been no doubt in our minds concerning Leith's intentions from the time that Kaipi brought us the message which Soma had dropped, but the knowledge that the brute had declared himself to the Professor and the two girls brought us a most horrible feeling. In my own case I had never experienced such a sensation. The strange rites connected with the "tivo" in the long cave had laid a foundation upon which my imagination piled skyscrapers of horror. If I could have fixed my mind upon a definite fate that would be theirs if they were not rescued from the big brute's clutches, I would have found relief, but my inability to do that left me a victim to thoughts that were enough to deprive one of his reason. We looked upon the island as the ceremonial place for rites that were stamped out in the groups where the missionary had pushed himself, and the message from Barbara Herndon became a mental piledriver to

ram home a thousand doubts that had obtained a footing in our minds.

"Come on!" cried Holman. "If we don't catch up with him I'll go mad!"

He turned to hurry along the narrow path, but out of the silence behind us came a shout that caused us to dive promptly into the bushes. The whoop came from the direction of the camping ground, and we had hardly crouched in the undergrowth when a nude native crashed through the vines and raced past our hiding place. He was followed by two more, the three running at top speed, heads forward, and their chests heaving in a manner that suggested they had come some distance.

In the glimpse we caught of them as they dashed past we came to the conclusion that they were three of the "tivo" dancers, and as we watched their bare brown backs disappear in the creepers we observed something which our position on the previous evening had prevented us from seeing. The backs of the three were tattooed, not with the common line tattooing, but with short scars that ran down the spine, making a ridged representation of a centipede, and as they passed I remembered that the Professor, when taking a photograph of the stone table on the previous morning, had commented on the same peculiar pattern which he had discovered upon one of the huge supporting pillars.

"They've come to tell Leith that we have escaped," whispered Holman.

"And they'll be on our trail the moment they give him the news."

"All right, we'll be ready for them. How much ammunition have you?

"Three cartridges," I replied.

"And I have four. We must make those seven — look out! There's another beggar coming!"

We dropped quickly out of sight and peered through the leaves. Holman was right. Some one else was coming along the path, but the newcomer was exercising much more prudence than the three dancers. Judging by the little intervals of silence that followed the slight noises made by the breaking of twigs, he was investigating each yard of the way.

A woolly head at last appeared through the network, and our nerves relaxed at the big brown eyes that rolled fearfully. The timorous stranger was Kaipi!

The Fijian was shaking with fear when we dragged him into the bushes. In halting words he told the story of his experiences of the night, and Holman and I listened. Kaipi had waited upon the ledge till a few hours before the dawn, and then he had made for the camp. With much better luck than we had struck, he reached there before daylight, but fearful of the happenings which would follow in the wake

of the devil dance, he had taken up a post of observation in a neighbouring tree and awaited events.

Leith, according to the Fijian, had arrived at dawn, accompanied by Soma and the one-eyed white man, and the big brute had immediately interviewed the Professor. Kaipi's actions, as he mimicked the elderly scientist, convinced us that the interview was not pleasant to the archæologist, and it was evident that it was at that moment Leith had declared himself as Barbara Herndon stated in her note.

"He kick up plentee big row," explained Kaipi. "He kick porter men an' make damn big noise outside missee tent. They come out speakee him, he slap big missee in face, drive 'em off."

Holman was crashing through the bushes before Kaipi had finished his recital, and I followed him, with the excited Fijian bringing up the rear. Leith was rushing the Professor and his daughters toward the black hills and we had to do something immediately.

For over an hour we stumbled along the track, making no effort to keep under cover in case Leith should have prepared an ambush. It was useless to argue with Holman, and my own feelings were such that I preferred to take the risks of the route which Soma's axe had cut, to the delays which the task of forcing our own passage through the laby-

rinth would bring upon us. Prudence was thrust into the background by the intense hate we entertained for the devil who had entrapped us.

It was near midday when our pursuit met with an interruption. A revolver cracked in a clump of wild ginger directly in front, and we took cover immediately. The bullet had whizzed close to Holman's head, and as we lay panting in the ribbon-grass we congratulated ourselves on the fact that we had been met with a single shot instead of a volley. We had taken a big chance and had come off lucky. It was impossible for Leith's party to be very far ahead, and as we watched the ginger clump we wondered how we could circumvent the sharpshooter.

After about five minutes of absolute quiet Kaipi turned his head and pointed to the rear, and Holman and I listened intently. The Fijian's sharper ears had detected slight sounds behind us, and as we strained the silence we came to the conclusion that the enemy had stealthily worked their way around us, and were now creeping like snakes through the maze with the hope that they would take us unawares.

We started to worm our way to the right, and our hatred of the infernal island, where we were reduced to the condition of burrowing moles, increased. Our eyes were practically useless. We

had to depend upon hearing alone, and when a white man pits his ears against those of a native he finds that he has been suffering from partial deafness without being aware of the fact. A dozen times we shifted ground on a signal from Kaipi, whose head was continually to the earth, and that game of hide and seek drove us frantic. Leith was hurrying toward the hills while we were crawling backward and forward through the undergrowth to escape a few natives who pursued their tactics with a persistency that was maddening. The fact that the pursuers had the advantage put a raw edge upon our tempers, and after an hour spent upon hands and knees Holman resolutely refused to shift his ground in response to Kaipi's signals. I was just as tired of the wormlike attitude that we were compelled to adopt, and I waited beside Holman while the Fijian slipped away through the creepers after warning us by many eloquent signals that one of the search party was creeping toward us.

Holman had a "let-'em-all-come" expression upon his face that would have been amusing at any other time, and kneeling with our backs to each other we endeavoured to peer through the leafage to get a glimpse of the foe.

We remained like that for about ten minutes; then our attention was attracted to a point about eighteen inches to the right. The dry leaves were pushed

quietly aside, but instead of a head appearing, as we expected, a bare brown leg was thrust through the creepers and remained stationary.

The leg fascinated us. Kaipi had moved in the opposite direction, and we were certain that the limb belonged to one of our enemies. The naked savage was worming his way upon his stomach, and the position immediately brought to our minds a picture of the scene in the long gallery. When it came to a game of this sort we would be hopelessly outclassed by a batch that, through assiduous training, slipped along with the ease of serpents.

Holman held his revolver in readiness and watched the leg. It was difficult to judge the position of the native's body, and the scarcity of ammunition made us hesitate before firing a shot. The leg was pushed farther out of the leafy tangle, and as it came toward him a change passed over Holman's face. He handed his revolver to me, crouched on his thighs and sprang!

There was something primitive about the action, something which caused my heart to throb as I watched him take the pantherlike spring. On the previous evening the youngster had expressed a desire to throttle Leith, and the same desire had gripped him when he watched the leg come through the vines. The devilishness of the batch made shooting a tame way of obtaining revenge, and I possessed the same itchiness of the fingers which had

prompted Holman to take the wild leap. There was a joy in throttling such a brute, and I delighted in the grit of the boy.

The affair was dramatic in its swift and silent ending. The native, taken entirely unawares, had no chance against the angry antagonist who had landed upon his back. A faint gurgle proved to me that Holman's fingers had found the neck of the other, and in an incredible short time the struggle was over.

We parted the bushes and examined the body. It was one of the three nude natives that had rushed by us on the trail a few hours before, and he clasped in his right hand a long knife of New Zealand greenstone that had been inlaid with gold in an intricate design. We had never seen such a weapon. The crude knives that I had seen throughout the islands were not to be compared to the wonderfully polished blade that had been intended to free either Holman or myself from all earthly cares, while the metalwork showed a craftmanship that made one wonder how many centuries had elapsed since the Polynesian artist who had fashioned the weapon had been laid in the Cavern of Skulls. The sinnet work and the parquetry of split bamboo, which comprise the highest handicraft of the present-day islander, could hardly be classed with the exceedingly beautiful work upon the blade.

Holman turned up the end of the haft, pointed to a delicate design of a centipede, and then looked down at the back of the savage upon the ground. The similarity of the two designs was immediately apparent, but while the one on the greenstone had been executed by an artist, the figure upon the back of the dancer was a crude example of scar-tattooing that required some imagination to puzzle out what object it was supposed to represent. As we glanced at each other the significance of the serpentlike dance, the marks upon the bodies of the dancers and on the knife and stone table, was plainly evident. The island was sacred to the centipede, and in some way Leith had made himself a chief wizard amongst the few savages who still performed the rites which had once made the Isle of Tears a place of particular importance to the surrounding groups.

Holman took the long greenstone knife, and we crept quietly away in the direction taken by Kaipi. We had one enemy less upon the island. Not counting the carriers, we reckoned that the active opposition comprised Leith, Soma, the one-eyed white man, and either two or three of the "tivo" dancers, and these made a formidable batch. The dancers were huge natives, possessing all the characteristics of the Tongans, while Leith, Soma, and the one-eyed white man possessed more than ordinary strength.

"We must try to find the path," whispered Hol-

man. "This delay will give Leith a chance to get to the hills."

But the finding of the path was no easy matter. So that we would be well out of the sphere of the companions of the man who carried the greenstone blade, we worked our way for about one hundred yards through the leafy maze before attempting to search for it, and that search proved a long and tiresome one. It is impossible to describe the network of wanton vegetation through which we struggled during the hot afternoon. Every kind of shrub and tree was woven into an ungodly tangle by the crawling, leaping vines that shut out the sky and made it impossible to see a person standing only a few feet away.

We stayed our appetites with wild guavas and yams, and moved slowly forward in the direction that we surmised that Leith was moving in. Our inability to find the path left us the only alternative of pushing on toward the hills in the hope that we would intercept the party before it reached the caverns which made the basalt cliffs a secure hiding place. Once the arch villain reached the caves it would be a difficult matter to locate him, and we damned the crazy brain of the Professor as we thought of the lonely position of the Isle of Tears. If the captain of *The Waif* was in league with Leith it would be absolutely impossible to obtain help to

rescue tne girls and their father, and we would be marooned upon the island for an indefinite period.

It was within a few minutes of sunset when our despondency was suddenly swept away. The silence of the jungle was disturbed by a shrill voice that protested loudly against something which the owner was called upon to do, and our hearts punched our ribs with mighty blows as we crawled forward. The voice belonged to Professor Clinton Herndon of California.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STONE TABLE

OUR feelings can hardly be described as we crept closer to the spot from which the scientist's angry protest had gone up through the silence like a thin wire. The loneliness of that day had been appalling. I know that Edith Herndon's quiet face was continually before my mental vision, while Holman's actions convinced me that he was suffering acutely. If we were certain that Leith intended to do no wrong to the party, the fact that he was within speaking distance of the two girls was particularly distressing after the knowledge we had gained in the night. With extreme caution we wormed our way forward, the Professor's piping voice acting as a verbal signpost in helping us to locate the spot where he was engaged in holding the argument. We were close enough to hear his words, and our nerves were on the highest tension as he shrieked a defiance against

some person near. We had only one thought as to who that person could be. The Professor was piling charges of treachery upon the head of a listener, and there was only one head on the Isle of Tears that contained enough villainy to make the charges possible!

"I will not sign the papers!" cried the scientist. "I want my liberty, sir! You are a scoundrel! Where are my daughters?"

Holman, creeping a few inches in front, had drawn his revolver. The blood pounded madly through my brain. We were within a few yards of Leith, and even as we moved snakily forward, the heavy bass voice of the scoundrel came to our ears.

"You stupid old fool!" he growled. "You can demand all day and all night if it does you any good. Do you know who I am?"

"I know you are a ruffian!" snapped the Professor. "I know you are a rogue who has no respect for his word and honour. I know you are a coward who insults women!"

"Go on," mocked Leith.

"I've been a fool!" cried the old man. "I was blinded to everything through my love of science. Now I know that you lied. I know you brought me here to rob me and insult my daughters."

The sun had set, and the twilight made it difficult for us to locate the two men. But we were close.

When Leith spoke again, his voice sounded so near that I started involuntarily, while Holman, resting upon one hand, parted the branches with the barrel of the revolver which he gripped in the other.

"But you will admit when all is over that I have shown you some wonderful things," sneered Leith.

The Professor was silent a moment, as if endeavouring to fathom the meaning of the words, and we moved a few inches closer in the little interval.

"How?" asked the scientist.

Holman's hand that gripped the revolver remained motionless. Through a rift in the leafy curtain I caught a glimpse of a bulk that was within a yard of our hiding place, and I knew that the youngster was waiting for the brute to speak to make certain that he was covering the right man. The silence was nerve-destroying.

"Why," said Leith, speaking slowly and distinctly, "you are in the hands of the Wizards of the Centipede. I am their head, and if you are not extremely lucky you will make a sacrifice to —— "

Something fell upon my head with tremendous force at that moment, but as the blow descended Holman fired, and even as I fought to escape the grip of the strong fingers that twined themselves around my neck, I realized with a great wave of

happiness that the bulk in front of me had pitched forward when the shot had shattered the silence.

In a wild bedlam of oaths and shouts we fought and struggled. The "tivo" dancers had followed upon our track through the long afternoon, and the time that we had lost in locating Leith had given them an opportunity to come up with us. In the gloom we threshed backward and forward, but our efforts to escape were vain. The one-eyed white man appeared mysteriously out of the shadows to help the huge natives, and in three minutes Holman and I were tied hand and foot and stretched out near the unfortunate Professor, who, with bound limbs, was sitting up in the centre of the grassy clearing where Leith and he had been exchanging personalities. There were no signs of the girls, and I wondered, as my brain recovered from the effects of the blow, what had happened to them.

Holman's voice put a question that roused me from my half stupor.

"Did I kill him?" cried the young fellow. "Tell me!"

The question was answered by a stream of blasphemy that came from Leith himself. The big ruffian had fallen into a bunch of ribbon-grass, but now, with the assistance of One Eye, he got to his feet and staggered toward us. From the actions of his white partner, I surmised that Holman's bullet had struck him in the left shoulder, and the

surmise proved true. The attack of the dancers had jerked the youngster's arm, and the wound was twelve inches above the point that Holman had aimed at.

With One Eye and the three dancers holding him upon his feet, and the blood dripping from the wound, he kicked us furiously, howling unspeakable imprecations as he drove his heavy boots against our ribs. We had met the real Leith at last. The devilishness that we had sensed behind the lustreless eyes blazed forth in full fury, and to me, familiar as I was with all the weird and wonderful curse phraseology used by the skippers and mates of the island boats, his anathemas impressed me as being the most blood curdling oaths that had ever come to my ears. The man was a devil at that minute. His tremendous strength made the restraining efforts of the other four useless, and we were in danger of being kicked to death if a merciful interruption had not stopped him. The horrified Professor, who was sitting upright during the exhibition of brutality, lifted up his voice in protest, and his shrill denunciations brought a cry out of the surrounding gloom.

"Father! father! Where are you, father?"

It was Edith Herndon's voice, and the note of agony in the words maddened me. I drove my teeth into Leith's left leg as he stood quiet for a second near my head, and the brute used the

sole of his right boot to loosen my grip. There were no gentle ways about the devil. As Edith's cry was repeated, he had administered a farewell kick to Holman and me, and shouted an order in the same strange dialect which the dancer had used in addressing me in the Cavern of the Skulls when the robe of parrot feathers had saved my life. The three natives immediately gripped us by the heels and we were dragged off into the bushes.

It seemed to me that Edith Herndon's cry was repeated again and again as the natives dragged me at a jog trot through the undergrowth. There was untold anguish in the cry. It was plain that Leith had taken the unfortunate old Professor some distance from his daughters so that they could not listen to the conversation, and the scientist's high-pitched protests against our maltreatment had caused the terror-stricken girls to think that Leith was ill-using their father. I imagined that the big ruffian had rushed us away from the spot lest the two women would escape from Soma and run to the assistance of their father, but I know that we were thankful that the interruption put an end to the football tactics in which the infuriated devil was indulging.

But we had escaped from the frying pan to find ourselves in the flames. The three dancers felt that the Fates had given them a chance to avenge

their friend, and they took full advantage of the opportunity. So that each would have a proper share in the burden, they placed us side by side, strapped our ankles together, and then, passing a rope through the straps, the three laid hold of it and set off through the night, towing us behind with an absolute disregard for our feelings. They entered into the fun of the thing. No Norwegian peasant ever towed home a Yule log with a greater exhibition of joy than those savages displayed as they hauled us through the thickets. They had a contempt for open places. They chose the most intricate paths they could find, and if a tough liana gripped Holman or me around the throat, the fiends found great fun in straining upon the rope till the wire-like creepers gave way.

We suffered unbearable torture. Hour after hour we were jerked over the ground. Our clothes were stripped from our backs, our faces were torn and bloody from the thorns, and our tormented flesh protested through every nerve against the treatment. Once Holman put a question in a hoarse whisper.

"Where are they taking us?" he asked.

"God knows," I gasped.

"It's my fault, Verslun."

"Why?" I groaned.

"I missed him! I missed him! I —— "

His voice died away in a choking sob, and I

imagine he swooned away. As we were being towed by the legs, I guessed that Holman was suffering excruciating pain from the limb that he had injured by the fall from the maupei tree, and the lapse into unconsciousness came as a blessed relief. To me the rush through the jungle seemed a superlative nightmare. My mind played tricks with me. I thought that the three black forms, leaping along in front, were a trinity of devils who were ordered to torture me for my stupidity in allowing Edith Herndon and her sister to leave the yacht. Every creeper became a whip wielded by a mocking phantom, and I am forced to confess that I have a vivid recollection of crying to heaven for pardon for my criminal negligence. Every horror that the happenings of the previous forty-eight hours had germinated within my brain sprang into lusty being as my mind trembled upon the abyss of insanity, and Edith Herndon was the person that the legion of horrors threatened.

I came to my proper senses to find that our towing trinity had called a halt. Holman was repeating a question over and over again, and I endeavoured to moisten my dry throat so that I could answer.

"Where are we?" he groaned. "Where are we? Are you dead, Verslun? Open your eyes and take a look around; my peepers are bunged up."

I managed to open my eyes, but I could see nothing but the encompassing jungle. For a few minutes I thought that we were alone. Then I made out the three figures crouched in front of us upon the grass. Their heads were turned away from us, and they were facing the east, where the faint luminous glow of the rising moon was just beginning to appear in the sky.

The three were motionless. They were squatting upon their hams, and their attitude seemed uncanny when I compared it with the mad film of action which my mental machinery had recorded during the preceding hours. They had stopped for some purpose, but that purpose I could not determine.

"Are they there?" asked Holman.

"Yes," I murmured.

"What are they doing?"

"Sitting in a line staring at the hills."

The youngster gave a grunt, turned his head till he managed to wipe the mud and blood from his eyes upon my shoulder, then he peered at the silent three. Their motionless forms fascinated him. It was hard to connect them with the three bounding devils who had brought us on a gallop that was more painful than the bareback ride which the Polish nobleman gave to the intriguing Mazeppa.

"What do you make of it?" he whispered.

"They're resting perhaps."

"Not them! They look as if they're hatching some new villainy."

Minute after minute crept by, but the three remained inactive. They took no notice of our whispered conversation. No Hindu Yogis ever sat meditating with the absolute immovability of the three, and as our wounds stiffened under the cold night air, we became foolishly angry at the wait. If we had to meet death, it would please us to get it over as soon as possible.

"If I could have one more fling at them," groaned Holman. "By all that's holy, Verslun, I feel that I could fight a million if these ropes were off me."

He endeavoured to get his face down to the bandages on my wrists, but we had been strapped in such a manner that it was impossible to reach any of the ropes with our teeth, so we lay quiet and reviewed the legion of tormenting thoughts that marched through our minds. The jungle, like the three natives, seemed to be waiting for a happening. The silence was more horrible than the thunder of an earthquake. It seemed to well out from the silent three, till we longed with a great longing for some terrific and prolonged noise to shiver it and send battalions of echoes to chase it into the hills.

The moon peered above the black cliffs, and the surroundings became more distinct. We were on the edge of a clearing, and there was something

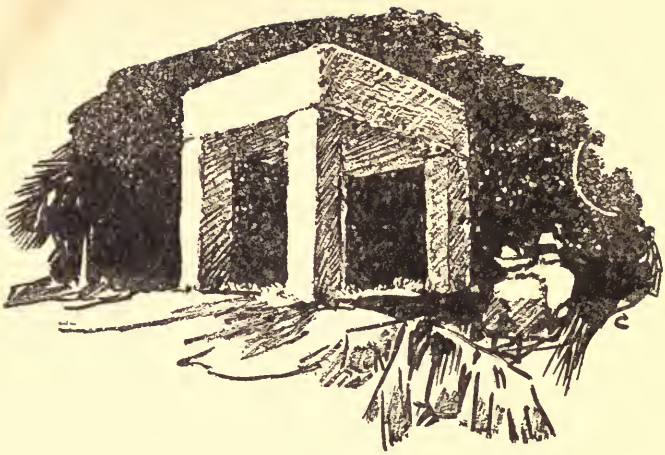
vaguely familiar about the trees that our cramped position allowed us to see. We felt certain that we had passed this place on our journey from the yacht, and each minute that passed strengthened the conviction.

"Seems to me that I've seen that tree before," muttered Holman.

"I hold the same impression," I said.

"And those rocks," remarked the youngster. "Why, we're going back to *The Waif!*"

The three natives rose together at that moment and gripped the rope. We gave a joint groan of agony as our stiffened limbs were jerked forward, and as we were pulled from the fringe of reed-like grass our exact whereabouts were made known to us. Standing up against the moon, the rim of the orb showing just above the massive top, was the great stone table that Holman and I had climbed two nights before!



CHAPTER XVII

BENEATH THE CENTIPEDE

THE natives moved at a slow walk across the clearing, and for this little indulgence we were exceedingly thankful. There was no grass covering upon the bed of coral rock in the middle of which the singular structure stood, and our bleeding bodies could have hardly stood a swift gallop across the prickly surface. As it was we were immensely glad when the trinity halted in front of the edifice.

"Say," murmured Holman, "do you remember what the Professor said about this place the other night when he was speaking about sacrificial altars?"

I groaned as an intimation that the subject was not a pleasant one, but Holman wanted to make

public admission that he had exhibited gross ignorance in ridiculing the Professor's assertions.

"I thought he was handing it out too strong, Verslun," he murmured, "but it strikes me now that he had the right dope about this infernal thing. I believe they're going to settle us."

I groaned again. Holman's airy manner of discussing our predicament annoyed me. I hated the Professor for making the remarks about sacrificial stones when he drew comparisons between the table and Aztec altars, because I now thought that the very fear planted within my brain would carry a thought suggestion to the three devils who had us prisoners. Under ordinary circumstances I am not deficient in physical courage, but our position in front of the strange monument on the Isle of Tears left me with the valour of a jack-rabbit. The terror generated by the surroundings bit into my system like an acid.

"What I'm wondering at," continued Holman, "is about that guy that we saw on the top of the place. How he got away was a mystery."

"It was," I replied. I didn't feel disposed to trust myself to make a longer comment at that moment.

"Well, they're going to start operations," said the youngster. "We're going to the top, Verslun."

It was plain that we were. Two of the natives

had shinned up one of the pillars by means of small notches in one corner, and now the other cut the bands that tied us together, promptly attached Holman's feet to the rope his comrades lowered, and signalled that all was ready by clapping his hands. The youngster was quickly jerked upward, and in a few minutes I was beside him on the moss-grown sloping surface of the immense stone.

The three dancers were evidently impressed with the importance of the work they had in hand. Their movements on the stone became more dignified and solemn. They moved around us in a manner that would have provoked laughter at any other time, and we watched eagerly for developments.

With much care they placed us side by side on the upper part of the stone, but Holman's feet were turned to my head, and as we were placed crosswise upon the inclined surface, my body was a few inches lower than his. That we were to be sacrificed appeared to be a certainty at that moment, but the method by which we were to be sent into eternity puzzled us. Not one of the three had a weapon. The surface of the stone was as bare as it was upon the night that we had investigated it, and we began to think that death by starvation and thirst would probably be our fate.

But thoughts of such an ending were soon put aside. Two of the savages slipped from the stone,

while the other dropped upon his stomach and hid his face. That something was going to happen we felt certain, but we could not discover the slightest clue that would guide our puzzled wits to a solution. We expected death, but we could not guess in what manner the job was to be performed.

"Looks as if something is coming, Verslun," cried Holman. "I was a fool to miss him, old man, but I guess — oh, Gee!"

The final exclamation was caused by a happening immediately beside us. A section of the moss-grown stone, about eight feet long and eighteen inches in width, started to rise slowly, and when our astonished eyes fell upon it we knew that we had the solution of the strange appearance of the figure upon the table on the night we camped in its shadow. Holman had seen this movable slab rise above the top of the table, but it had returned to its groove before we had climbed the tree, and it had fitted so closely into its moss-grown bed that we had been unable to detect a crevice in the moonlight. We had been on the verge of a discovery, but as we recalled the incident, lying there helpless, we were doubtful if it would have saved us from the fate we expected. The note which Soma had dropped gave full confirmation to all our suspicions concerning Leith, yet we had been unable to hold our own against him.

One end of the slab remained stationary after

it had risen a few inches from its bed, but the other end, which was nearest us, went up and up, pushed by some screwjack arrangement that lifted it with slow, jerky movements till it was nearly upright. The moonlight fell upon the under surface that was turned toward us, and we understood the manner in which Leith's friends had arranged for us to make our exit from this world. The bottom of the stone slab had been carved into a perfect representation of a centipede, and as the slab remained stationary just before it reached the perpendicular, I began to dive into my mental reticule for the scraps of prayers that had been caught and held through a rather checkered career in places where the efficacy of prayer was looked upon with a cold eye.

The prostrate savage rose slowly when the movements of the slab had ceased, and very tenderly he rolled Holman and me over the bed from which the stone had been lifted. He pushed our bodies against the wooden post that, fitting into a sliding groove on the body of the stone centipede, had lifted the thing upright, and to make certain that we would be in the exact centre of the depression when the stone came back to its proper resting place, he strapped us carefully to the support with pieces of ramie fibre, so that we could not move an inch. With faces turned upward we stared at the carved figure above us, and the insecure tenure we had

upon life at that moment was impressed upon our minds by the extreme caution which the officiating wizard exercised in keeping his own body clear of the slab lest his brethren, who were evidently operating the clumsy mechanism from some place nearby, should let the stone centipede return to his home without giving him proper warning.

At last he finished the business to his satisfaction and stepped backward. My imagination made the thing above me tremble as I looked at it with eyes of fear. The part of my body that spanned the depression became numb, and I breathed with difficulty.

Holman broke the silence. "Good-bye, Verslun," he said cheerfully. "It's mighty tough to go out like this, but it's the fortune of war."

I endeavoured to answer him, but the words, as if afraid of the horror that loomed above me, refused to come out of my throat. The fiendish manner in which we were to be killed unmanned me. The slab paralyzed thought, and it seemed to me that only the inmost kernel of my being, a very pin-point of the refined essence of life, was throbbing within my body.

The officiating wizard stepped around us for a final survey. He glanced keenly at the position of our bodies, and, evidently satisfied that the centipede had every opportunity to make a good job,

he flung himself down upon his face and started to murmur softly in the strange dialect which Leith had spoken when addressing the three earlier in the night, and which the dancer had used in the Cavern of Skulls. I remember that I tried during those few minutes to catch a word or two of the queer tongue, and curiously enough, in that moment of extreme peril, I endeavoured to connect it with some of the dialects I had heard during my long stay in the islands. The soft muttering seemed to be a thread connecting us with life itself, and I dreaded the moment it would cease.

I do not know how long the chant continued. It rose and fell, a soft rhythmic murmur, and I prayed that it would never end. My ears sucked it in as if it was a life line to which my soul was clinging, and I dimly understood my eagerness to catch the sounds. My ability to do so seemed to be wanted as proof to convince my half-paralyzed body that I was still alive.

The low chant ended with a little throaty cry, and I shut my eyes tight to save myself the final moment of agony which the falling of the stone would bring. For an instant there was absolute silence, then some one gripped me by the legs and pulled madly. The ramie fibre held my body to the supporting post of the centipede, and I heard Holman give a muttered order. A knife sawed

the cords, a pair of hands gripped my heels and flung me forward, and as I fell clear of the groove the stone horror crashed back into its bed with a jolt that shook the huge table! I opened my eyes to see Kaipi looking at the face of the dancer he had stabbed in the back as the brute was muttering his prayer!

"Oh hell!" said the Fijian. "Me thought him Soma. Me made mistake! Me going kill Soma, he kill Toni, Toni all same my brother, work long time with me at Suva!"

"Hurry up and cut these ropes," cried Holman. "There are two more of those devils and they'll be back before we get the cramp out of our muscles."

Kaipi sprang to obey, but when our bonds were cut away, we found that we could not get to our feet. Legs and arms were completely numbed, and the many abrasions that we had come by during the towing process to which we had been subjected made Kaipi's efforts to restore circulation by rubbing a species of torture that would surely have earned the commendation of Torquemada if it had been brought under his notice.

"Narrow squeak, Verslun," remarked Holman, as he endeavoured to get to his knees. "I wonder where those two other devils went to work the machinery."

"They must be close," I whispered. "Drag us over to the edge, Kaipi. They'll surely come up to see how the job was done or to see what is delaying their pal."

Kaipi helped us over to the edge of the table, and while he was doing so he related briefly how he came to be on hand at the opportune moment. Our little expedition to the stone table had passed the Fijian soon after the trinity had taken us in tow, and Kaipi's eyes had mistaken the biggest of the three natives for Soma. Revenge for Toni's death being the one motive that inspired him, he had followed the procession, watched from the bushes till the other two dancers had left Soma's double with us on the top of the table, and had then climbed quietly up and knifed the officiating wizard while that person was exhorting the stone centipede to make a good job of Holman and me. The matter of our rescue had been an afterthought. Strictly speaking, he deserved no great amount of praise for dragging us out of danger, as he frankly admitted that he was waiting for a good chance to attack the person who resembled Soma, without having any particular worry whether the stone slab would descend before the opportunity arrived.

"Never mind, Kaipi," said Holman, peering cautiously over the edge of the table, "I'm satisfied that you were handy at the moment without con-

sidering whether you came to help us or for some other purpose."

"Toni all the same brother to me," muttered the Fijian, dimly understanding the meaning of the remark; "me kill Soma pretty damn soon."

"Quite so," murmured Holman. "We'll give our consent to that operation, but keep quiet for the present till our two friends come back to see how neatly the old centipede fixed us."

We remained silent, but not inactive. As we waited for the missing pair we rubbed our limbs carefully, and at the end of ten minutes we began to feel alive. Our revolvers had been lost from our pockets during the mad rush through the night — Leith had been too intent on kicking us to order his guard to search us for arms — and now we had nothing but our bare hands with which to do combat with a pair of dancers. But we thought we could do a lot with bare hands when we glanced at the spot where the stone centipede had crashed back to its bed. A vision of that devilish carving standing above one in the moonlight was enough to stimulate a person to herculean tasks when he understood that failure would bring him again under its ghastly shadow.

For about twenty minutes we waited patiently. Kaipi had asserted that the two savages had slipped into the jungle growth after they had left the table,

and it was evident that they had gone to some underground passage that connected with one of the pillars of the altar, through which the crude mechanism for lifting the stone slab had been operated. With one eye always to the dramatic, the wizards of the long ago had built the altar so that the common worshippers surrounding the place on days when the centipede was called upon to mash some unfortunate victim could not see how the slab was lifted, and would thus put the uplifting of the thing down to supernatural agency. It was the tribal Houdin who laid the foundation of many a strange belief amongst savage races.

"Must be waiting for him to come to them," said Holman. "We'll give them a few minutes longer."

It was Kaipi's sharp eyes that made the discovery. The pair came cautiously out of the bushes immediately underneath the tree which Holman and I had climbed to obtain a view of the surface of the table two nights before, and they crossed the clearing with hesitating steps. They evidently expected the officiating wizard to announce in sporting phraseology that the centipede had won the engagement with one swift blow to the body, and when no news was forthcoming they were puzzled.

They confabbed in the centre of the clearing, and then hailed the table in the strange tongue.

"They confabbed in the centre of the clearing and then hailed the table in the strange tongue."

Receiving no answer, they again debated with much vigour, and, finally taking their courage in their hands, they came forward with quickened steps.

We crept close to the edge, careful not to peer over while the pair were climbing up. As far as I was aware we had no plans made for their reception. Holman and I had no weapons, neither had the two dancers; Kaipi had the ugly short-bladed knife with which he had dispatched Soma's double.

The puffing of the climbing pair came to us. They came near and nearer. A black arm came up over the edge of the table and clawed at the moss-grown stone, but while Holman and I reached forward with the intention of gripping the climber by the throat, Kaipi upset our plans by driving the blade of the knife into the back of the huge paw that was endeavouring to get a grip!

A tremendous howl of pain came from the owner of the hand, the pinioned member was torn from beneath the blade, and as we pushed our heads over the edge, the top climber fell backward, swept his companion from the pillar, and the pair struck the coral rock beneath the table with a thud that was suggestive of broken bones. The native with the skewered hand picked himself up and dashed toward the trees, but the other remained at the foot of the pillar, and his position led us to believe that his neck had been broken by the fall.

"My knife!" cried Kaipi. "He knocked my knife down!"

The Fijian swung himself over the edge, and with monkey-like agility slipped down the pillar. He shouted up to us that he thought that the man on the ground was dead, but having found his precious knife, he proceeded to set all doubts upon the matter at rest.

"Soma better dodge that little fire eater," muttered Holman. "I thought him a coward last night, but it looks as if he's a fighter when once he gets started."

As we were unable to slip down the stone pillar in the same manner as the natives, we found the piece of rope by which the three dancers had hauled us up to the top, and making it secure upon a stone projection we lowered ourselves to the ground.

"Now," said Holman, "we must make a new start, and if we get beat in this round we deserve all that the big fiend who has brought all this trouble about can do to us. Kaipi, you're a friend of mine for all time. Shake hands."

The grinning Fijian shook hands with both of us, and we moved toward the trees, heading in the direction of the spot where Leith had kicked us so vigorously a few hours before.

CHAPTER XVIII

BARBARA'S MESSENGER

WE HAD a healthy respect for the deviltry of Leith and his friends as we turned our backs upon the lonely throne of the centipede, but the cry of "Father" which Edith Herndon had uttered was still ringing in our ears, and we were anxious to get within hitting distance of the big, treacherous ruffian. A mental review of the engagements made us feel rather light-hearted as we pushed through the tangle. If there were only six native dancers upon the island at the opening of the conflict in the Cavern of Skulls, we had reduced that number to one, while the bullet in Leith's shoulder would depreciate his fighting ability for some time. Outside the carriers, who, as far as we knew, were neutral in the matter, we had as opponents, Leith,

One Eye, Soma, and the dancer whose hand had been punctured by Kaipi, and the knowledge that we were more evenly matched brought us some consolation.

But the fact that Edith and Barbara Herndon were in the power of the scoundrel brought thoughts that cast a damper upon the little scrap of joy we derived from reckoning up the casualties of the enemy. The passion which Leith displayed after receiving Holman's bullet made us run forward like madmen each time we recalled the diabolical frenzy that he exhibited. We could not think of a good plan to circumvent the brute. The jungle hampered and maddened us, and although we knew that we had gone about our work in a blundering fashion, the circumstances were such that we could not improve our strategy in the future.

We plunged on till nearly midnight, then Holman called a halt.

"We must sleep," he said. "One can watch while the other two get some rest."

Kaipi, who declared that he was never less inclined for slumber, agreed to take first watch, and Holman and I flung ourselves down upon the grass. We had had no slumber on the previous night, and the incidents in which we had taken part had left us exhausted.

It was daybreak before Kaipi awakened us, and

the face of the Fijian informed us that something had alarmed him. He was stretched full length on the ground, listening as only a native can listen, and we waited for his report. We had much respect for Kaipi's hearing after checking the signals he made concerning the approaching "tivo" dancer on the previous afternoon.

"What is it?" asked Holman.

"Some one go by, much hurry," murmured the Fijian.

We crouched in the bushes and listened. It was hardly likely that Leith had changed his route, and the only person that we knew to be in our neighbourhood was the dancer.

"If we could get hold of him we might use the third degree on him to guide us to the spot that Leith is making for," said Holman. "We'll be outgeneralled completely if he gets into those caverns on the hills. If he has provisions he can snap his fingers at a regiment."

I agreed with him on that point. The valley inside the basalt cliffs, and which, as far as we could judge, could only be entered by the slippery pathway in the Vermilion Pit, was about the finest natural hiding place in the world. Without taking the caves into consideration, the luxurious vegetation in the cup between the hills made the finding of a person a matter of extreme luck. It was a marvel-

lous maze that Nature seemed to have constructed especially for the diabolical work in which Leith was engaged.

Kaipi's ear was still to the ground, and the anxious look upon his face convinced us that some one was close.

"Coming back again," breathed the Islander. "One man, walk slow."

Our own ears acquainted us of the approach at that moment. The sound of crackling twigs was quite close, and we waited breathlessly, eying the green curtain through which we expected the unknown to thrust himself.

A black head bobbed through the leaves, and Holman planted a fist between the newcomer's eyes before the head could be withdrawn. The morning visitor dropped to the ground, and the three of us promptly fell upon him, the bloodthirsty Kaipi having to be restrained by main force from giving another exhibition of neat knifework.

"Who is it?" asked Holman. "Get back, Kaipi, and let me see."

We dragged the panting prisoner into the light, but instead of the escaped dancer, we found that we had trapped one of the five carriers, a big Raretongan named Maru, who was possessed of enormous strength.

Holman's punch had been no light one, and it was

a few seconds before the mists had cleared from the Raretongan's brain; then his big brown eyes lit up with a smile of gladness, and he nodded to Holman.

"Me want you," he said.

"Quite so," muttered Holman, "but I got you first."

Maru smiled the smile of the man who has a card up his sleeve, and he fumbled in the folds of his sulu till he found what he wanted. With a dramatic flourish he drew from the cloth a small emerald ring that belonged to Barbara Herndon, and he smiled childishly as he saw the look of astonishment upon Holman's face as he snatched the trinket.

"Why — who — how the devil did you get this?" he asked.

"Little missee give me," replied Maru, still convulsed with the humour which his childish mind found in the situation. "She tell me come alonga you."

Holman poured out a torrent of questions which the smiling messenger endeavoured to answer to the best of his ability. In pigeon English he informed us that he had deserted Leith's camp about midnight; that the big ruffian had turned abruptly from the direction he was moving in at the time we caught up with him, and that Holman's bullet had caused him serious inconvenience. The two girls and the Professor were in charge of Soma and

the one-eyed white man, who, we now learned, was deaf and dumb. It was while One Eye was on guard that Barbara Herndon had been able to bribe the Raretongan to throw the strength of his muscles upon our side of the argument.

Holman, with lover-like longing for anything owned by the lady of his choice, attempted to put the emerald ring in his pocket, but Maru objected strongly. The smile fled from his face, and his broken English nearly strangled him in his efforts to pour out enough of it to acquaint Holman of the nature of the agreement which he had entered into with Barbara Herndon.

"Me only show you ring, that's all!" he cried. "You look, know little missee send me, ring mine all time. You give back."

"You had better give it back to him," I cautioned. "He has got the idea into his head, and it will take a lot of arguing to convince him that Miss Barbara didn't give it to him to keep."

"But she didn't!" cried Holman. "Why would she give him a ring? She just gave him a loan of it to let him see that she had sent him to us."

"My ring all time," protested Maru. "That my pay fight mighty good for you."

"Give it up to him," I advised. "He's only an overgrown child, and he has set his mind on it."

"But, Verslun, I know she wouldn't do that!" protested the lover. "Barbara sent me this as ——"

"Oh, I know," I cried, "but we want fighters now, and Maru is a pretty athletic person."

"Me damn good fighter!" cried the Raretongan. "Me plentee good fighter if me get ring."

Holman gave up the trinket with a snort of disgust, and a few minutes afterward, when we were tramping along, I made it my business to drop back beside Maru and advise him to keep the ring out of the youngster's sight till we had rescued Miss Barbara. If the native had displayed his reward it was highly probable that the lovesick Holman, with nerves on the raw edge from want of sleep and worry, would have pounced upon the mighty Maru and endeavoured to obtain possession of what he fondly thought was a token of affection from his beloved.

But the arrival of the messenger was worth more than the emerald ring to us at that moment. He had more woodcraft than Kaipi, who had spent most of his time upon the ocean, and his information regarding the direction in which Leith was now heading saved us many weary hours of marching.

Yams and guavas, with wild passion fruit, made a breakfast and dinner as we clawed our way in pursuit. At midday we judged that we were hot upon the trail, unless Leith had changed his course,

but the black cliffs were close to us at that moment, and the recollections of the gloomy caverns made us silent as we pushed through the matted jungle. We could see no trace of the path which Leith would be compelled to cut to enable the two girls to get through, and we heard no sounds. A lone parrakeet startled us with its harsh cry as it rose from a maupei tree, and the bird even seemed to recognize that it had committed a breach in sending its unmusical cry out upon the awful quiet of the place.

Kaipi climbed a tall tree in the vain hope of catching sight of Leith's party as it crossed the small cleared spaces in the middle of the impenetrable growth, but nothing except the green plain of bushy tops and parasitical creepers was visible. As we waited beneath the tree the "ticking" of a wood bug sounded like hammer blows in the tremendous quietude, while the bursting of a pod reminded one of the beginning of a Fourth of July celebration. We had lost all trace of Leith, and now, immediately in front, rose the cliffs, and we saw a menace on their dark, forbidding front.

The base of the hills presented the same nearly perpendicular formation that we had met when endeavouring to reach the long gallery, and we held a council to decide on what would be the best course to pursue. Maru was confident that Leith was heading for this particular point at the moment

that Barbara's bribe caused the Raretongan to desert, and it was reasonable to think that the ruffian had retired to some hiding place to nurse his wound and decide upon the fate of the Professor and his two daughters. From the scraps of conversation which we had overheard before Holman interrupted the argument between Leith and the scientist, we thought it probable that the old man would visit the centipede upon the big table if he did not sign the papers that Leith required, while we shuddered at the probable fate of the two girls unless Providence directed us as to the manner in which we could effect a rescue.

"We must divide," said Holman. "I'll take Kaipi and go north, you take Maru and go in the opposite direction. If you find the trail, camp near it and send Maru on the run back to us. I'll do the same if I strike the spoor of the big devil."

It was about two o'clock, as nearly as we could judge, when we separated. We agreed to keep as close as possible to the rocky wall so that a messenger from one would have less difficulty in locating the other, and Maru and I found, before we had gone a hundred yards, that the nearer we could get to the cliff the quicker we could get along. The lianas found it difficult to get a grip upon the rocks, and we could worm our way without much trouble.

We had travelled about three quarters of a mile

when the native dropped upon his knees and I immediately followed his example. The ordinary Polynesian is not to be compared with the Australian black fellow or the American Indian in his knowledge of the forest, but Maru was an exception. His sight and hearing were abnormally keen, and he examined the grass carefully.

"One man go by here pretty short time ago," he whispered.

"Native?" I asked.

"No, him wear shoes."

The Raretongan crawled forward on his knees, his face close to the grass. The tracks upon the soft grass showed that the person was moving in the direction we were going, and for about twenty yards we followed cautiously. Leith, the one-eyed white man, and the Professor were the only three men on the Isle of Tears, outside Holman and myself, who would be wearing shoes. It was hard to think that the Professor or Leith would be alone at that moment, so I concluded, as we crawled along in the shadow of the cliff, that the tracks were made by One Eye.

Maru suddenly sprang to his feet and stood listening. I listened too. Into the awful silence came a tremendous rumbling that increased each second till I pictured it as a cancer of noise growing with appalling rapidity within the encompassing stillness.

"What is it?" I gasped. "Why it's —— "

I understood at that moment, and I sprang toward the jungle, but the big hand of the Raretongan gripped my shoulder and dragged me close to the cliff beneath an overhanging ledge.

"Stay here!" he yelled, raising his voice above the tumult that seemed to be coming out of the heavens. "Keep close much!"

The noise was deafening. The black cliff seemed to rock behind us, and as Maru pulled me down on my knees five hundred tons of rock shot from the heights and flattened ten square yards of the packed shrubs immediately in front of us!

"Now!" screamed Maru, as the dust swept in under the ledge and nearly choked us; "we get away quick, plenty dust, they can't see!"

The dirt and small rocks had rolled back upon us till we stood ankle deep, but the native's advice was good. Hugging the wall of the cliff, we ran back on our tracks till we had passed the area devastated by the landslide; then we sprang into the bushes and peered up at the cliff. High above the cloud of dust that was still rising from the ground, and leaning forward so that he could view the extent of the avalanche, was the one-eyed white man!

"Maru," I whispered, "go back and get Holman. I'll wait here till you come."

CHAPTER XIX

LEITH SCORES

THE one-eyed man stood for a long time contemplating his handiwork. From his point of observation he watched the pile of rocks and the surrounding bushes, and the absence of movement convinced him that the job had been well done. He commenced to make facial contortions as an outlet for the mirth he was generating inside, and at intervals he managed to produce a peculiar noise that reminded one of the bubbling of a camel. I began to think that One Eye, besides being deaf and dumb, was suffering from a shortage of gray matter inside his ugly-shaped head. He strutted up and down, and narrowly escaped top-

pling over the ledge through attempting a cake dance as a grand finale to the insane actions prompted by the successful manner in which he had engineered the landslide.

The afternoon had lengthened out before Maru returned with Holman and Kaipi, and we hurriedly considered the best course to pursue. One Eye had been with Leith when Maru deserted, so it was obvious that we were not far from the ruffian's hiding place.

"If we could catch this lunatic on the cliff?" muttered Holman. "Gee! we could tickle him with Kaipi's old knife blade till he ran us right into the haunt."

"He's deaf," I said; "there's a good chance of roping him in if we could scale the cliff."

"Me climb!" said Maru. "Him not hear. Me climb all alonga track, drop down, breakem him neck."

"No, don't break his neck!" growled Holman. "We want him as a guide. Do you understand? He knows where Leith is hiding, and if we could get hold of him it would be clear sailing."

Maru borrowed Kaipi's knife, nodded confidently as we adjured him to use caution, and then slipped back along the track so that he could climb to the level of the one-eyed person's perch before attempting to creep upon him. We sat down to await de-

velopments. The witless one was evidently a look-out, and it was advisable to wait and see the success of Maru's expedition before we attempted to move.

It was a long wait. Maru didn't intend to take any chances by closing in hurriedly, and it was nearly two hours after his departure before we saw his head rise above a boulder high up over the spot where One Eye was keeping his vigil. It was evidently not the first time that the native had stalked a human being, and his fine tactics, which should have called forth praise, severely tried the small amount of patience that we possessed. Holman cursed softly beneath his breath as Maru sat for ten minutes at a time studying the route before attempting to move from a sheltering rock, and my own nails burrowed into the palms of my hands as I watched. The Raretongan was a genius in his own particular line, and I think he took more than ordinary precautions so that his success would prove to Holman that Barbara Herndon had not overpaid him when she presented him with the emerald ring as a reward for his desertion from Leith. Maru had no idea of the sentimental view of the matter which the youngster took; and he thought that Holman's objections against the bargain were caused by the thought that no services could be rendered that would be half as valuable

as the trinket. The unsentimental savage could not imagine that the unstrung lover wanted the ring as a keepsake of the girl who had won his heart on board *The Waif*.

"Cæsar's Ghost! Why doesn't he hurry?" cried Holman. "That madman looks as if he's going to change his camping ground!"

It looked as if the witless one was really going to move, and Maru had still some fifty yards to cover before he would be directly above the other's head. Our nerves were in such a state that we felt inclined to scream out to the patient stalker. If we could grab the scout we could probably induce him by gentle persuasion to act as guide, but if he escaped us, we pictured ourselves stumbling over precipices and through dark caverns with the same lack of results as had marked our trip to the place of skulls.

Maru was decreasing the distance by inches. Slowly, very slowly, with all the serpentlike cunning of the savage, he advanced till he was almost above the spot where the other stood taking a survey of the jungle. But it was a farewell glance for One Eye. If Leith had placed him there to keep watch till he had reached a safe position, the watcher evidently considered that the time was up. He hopped to another ledge with the agility of a goat, and Holman groaned.

Maru noticed the retreat, and quickened his

movements. Dropping cautiously from ledge to ledge he crept upon the other with the swiftness of a leopard creeping upon its prey. One Eye's deafness left him at the mercy of the shadow in his rear. Swiftly taking cover whenever the white man's head moved to the right or the left, the native decreased the distance, and we rose to our knees.

Then Maru sprang. His muscular right arm went round the neck of the white, and we were rushing toward the cliff without waiting to see the outcome of the struggle. The Raretongan's strength was immense, and we knew that the other could not break the strangle hold that had been put upon him. We were more afraid that One Eye would be choked into insensibility before we reached the post.

The big native was sitting astride his captive when we gained the ledge, and the prisoner was blinking his one good eye as he stared up at him. We dropped down beside him and took a look at the sun-tanned face. He exhibited no fear, and the weak, watery eye showed no glint of intelligence. It was plain that his brain was slightly deranged.

Holman jerked him into a sitting position, and with signs and gestures we endeavoured to explain what we wanted him to do. Neither of us understood the deaf and dumb alphabet, but the alphabet was hardly necessary. With much pantomimic

action we described Leith, the Professor, and the two girls, and Kaipi enjoyed himself immensely by waving his knife in front of One Eye's face to signify the fate that awaited him if he did not immediately guide us to the spot. The Fijian was so proud of the blade that he could hardly be prevented from burying an inch of the steel in the prisoner's body.

One Eye, although obviously half-witted, saw that Kaipi was only looking for an excuse to send him to a more undesirable place than the Isle of Tears, and he made eager signs that he would act as our guide. Holman relieved him of the revolver and cartridges he had in his pockets, strapped his arms behind him, and with Maru's hand clutching the collar of his coat, we signalled to him to step forward and step lively if he wished to delay his journey to the other world till his soul was in a better condition. The sun was close to the high ridges in the west, and we wished to close with Leith before nightfall.

One Eye taxed our climbing powers in the next ten minutes. With the agility of a chamois he scurried along the narrow ledges, and several times Maru was forced to check his speed so that we could keep pace with him. Holman's face showed the joy he felt at receiving another opportunity to retrieve the blunders we had made in our two previous

attacks. Now we had reduced the big villain's fighting bodyguard to two persons, Soma and the dancer, and if he had not impressed the carriers, we outnumbered him. But Leith was on his own ground, and we had already discovered that the Isle of Tears made an ideal retreat for an outlaw. The nearly impassable jungle, surrounded by the cliffs that were tunnelled with tremendous caverns, made a hiding place in which a few men could defy an army.

One Eye moved along the side of the cliff for about five hundred yards, then turned into a small cañon hardly thirty feet wide, the bottom of which was about twenty yards above the valley from which we had climbed.

Our intuition told us that we were near the retreat, and we halted the hurrying guide, and in the shelter of a boulder explained to him with more signs and gestures that we wished to proceed with extreme caution. The end of the gulch that was not more than a stone's throw from the face of the cliff was already dark with the shadows of the hills, and as we suspected that the opening to Leith's refuge was close, we wished to make no unnecessary noise in approaching it. Using the scattered rocks as covering, we advanced slowly, but before we reached the end the sun had disappeared, and the absence of twilight, noticeable in that latitude, com-

pelled us to crawl along in a darkness that made it impossible to discern any object that was more than three feet distant. Holman was on one side of One Eye while Maru guarded him on the other side, and as the bottom of the gorge made it impossible for more than three to move abreast, Kaipi and I crawled in the rear.

We were at One Eye's mercy at that moment, but the idiot appeared to be much impressed by the manner in which we had pictured the sure and sudden fate that would fall upon him if we suspected him of treachery. The mystery of the place gripped us as we went forward. High above us the stars looked as if they were floating sequins in a sea of dark blue.

But the stars were blotted out suddenly, and I drew Holman's attention to the fact. The youngster got to his feet and groped around in the gloom, while we halted till he made an investigation. It was impossible to see the face of the half-witted guide to gain any information from his gestures.

Holman stooped and whispered his finding to us. "We're in a covered passageway," he murmured. "I can just touch the roof by standing on tiptoe. As we're in the place we might as well walk instead of crawling; we'll get to the end quicker."

Maru dragged One Eye to his feet, and we pushed on. The air of the place was much sweeter than

the atmosphere of the Cavern of Skulls. The floor, instead of being covered with thick dust as we had found it in the former place, was one of clean, smooth rock, and the walls were perfectly dry.

I had gripped One Eye's left arm while Holman was making the examination of the passage, and we had not proceeded more than twenty yards when he intimated that he wished to turn to the right. We allowed him to do so, and for fully twenty minutes he followed a zigzag course that left us completely nonplussed as to the way we had come. We could hardly count the number of the turnings. First to the right, then to the left, then back again toward the mouth of the place, he trotted forward with nothing to guide him, yet when we checked him at certain corners to find out if there was an angle in the path, we found that he was right in every instance.

"He's counting the number of paces he takes between the turnings," muttered Holman. "No man, unless he had the eyes of a cat, could find his way along this passage. Keep a grip on him or we'll never see daylight again."

We guessed that we had walked for over half a mile when the guide stopped abruptly. In the dark we endeavoured to find out what had pulled him up short, but we tried in vain. A prick from Kaipi's knife blade would not make him budge an inch,

and we clustered together and racked our brains to find the solution.

"P'raps we're up against something," whispered Holman. "Feel if there's anything in front, Verslun."

I walked forward a pace and groped in the blackness. My fingers touched solid rock. It hemmed us in on all sides. One Eye had walked us to the end of the passage, and we had come up against a blind wall.

I whispered the news to Holman, and he swore softly. Maru's fingers tightened on the collar of the prisoner till his breath came in short gasps. Kaipi moved around to the side of the prisoner, but I pushed him roughly back. The Fijian's desire to use his knife on all occasions was somewhat irritating.

"What'll we do?" asked Holman.

"Get back," I answered. "He's either fooled us or he's lost his way."

Holman gripped One Eye by the neck and shook him roughly. The youngster's temper was up, and it looked as if we had wasted the hours we had spent in capturing the idiot alive, and the time lost in following behind him through the cañon and the crooked passage. And time was precious when we thought of the agony which Edith and Barbara Herndon were suffering.

In his temper Holman forgot that the prisoner

was deaf, and he shouted a question at him. "What the devil is wrong?" he screamed. "Damn you, will —— "

Maru interrupted with a cry of astonishment. The wall at the end of the passage appeared to slide away, and, standing directly in front of us, his big frame outlined against a fire of brushwood that blazed behind him, was Leith!

Holman gave a yell of rage and sprang forward, and Leith turned and sped into the gloom. In his astonishment at finding himself confronted by the enemy when the stone door had rolled aside, Holman had forgotten that he had a revolver in his possession, and Leith had passed the brushwood fire before I yelled out to the youngster to shoot.

Holman fired immediately, and Leith staggered. For a moment we thought that he was down, but he picked himself up and ran on. I snatched a blazing pine limb from the fire as I rushed by, and with the light flickering upon the walls of the place, we sped madly after the flying figure that was barely discernible when the blazing branch flung a splinter of light into the gloom.

Holman emptied the revolver, but the pounding of Leith's feet that came back to us proved that he was still running. Maru and Kaipi were hallooing far behind, but Holman and I ran side by side, our

minds unable to think of anything but the capture of the human tiger in front.

We were gaining on him. We could hear his laboured breathing, and I remembered with a thrill of satisfaction the wound that he had received the night before. It was only a question of time when we would have our fingers on his throat. "Keep it up!" gasped Holman. "We've got him, Verslun! We've got him!"

It looked like it. The red glow from the torch enabled us to catch an occasional glimpse of shoes moving up and down at such a rate that the limbs to which they were attached always remained outside the area that was faintly illuminated. The momentary view of the footgear, together with the maddening *plop plop* it made upon the rock, raised an insane idea within my brain that we were chasing a pair of bewitched shoes that were enticing us into the very heart of the mountain. The scanty diet and the happenings of the two preceding days had left me light-headed. The race was unreal. I had an idea that the shoes would run on forever, and that every yard they covered took me farther away from Edith Herndon.

The flame of the pine branch went out, and we were left in utter darkness. But the sound of the flying feet still came back to us. At times we were so near that Holman thrust out his hands as he ran,

and cursed softly as the sounds seemed to draw away from him.

"I'll have you yet!" he cried. "I'll choke you, you devil!"

A chuckle came out of the darkness and at that instant I made a discovery. Leith was not alone. Keeping time with the clatter of the shoes was a softer tattoo that told me that a barefooted runner was racing beside the man we were pursuing.

Holman made the discovery at the same moment. "Soma," he breathed, and he ran faster. From some place that seemed to be leagues in the rear came the shouts of Maru and Kaipi, but their yells died away, and we were convinced that they had given up the chase.

The *plop plop* of the shoes ceased suddenly, and we slackened speed. Our brains suggested that Leith had stopped abruptly on the chance of doubling back before we could pull up, and a sweat of terror broke out upon us. If he doubled successfully he would reach the stone door through which we had got the first glimpse of him.

"He's turned!" cried Holman. "We'll get him, Verslun! After the — O God! *Look out!*"

Holman's warning came too late. The rocky floor over which we had been running, dropped away from us. I pitched forward after the youngster into a gulf of darkness, landed on my shoulder upon

a mass of volcanic ash, and clutching vainly at the stuff, I rolled at tremendous speed down into the bowels of the earth. From far above us came the sounds of uncontrolled merriment — the high-pitched shrieks of a native rising above the deep bass laughter of Leith.

CHAPTER XX

THE BLACK KINDERGARTEN

I THOUGHT we were a thousand years rolling down that slope of smothering ash. It was a quicksand that melted beneath us. We drove our arms into it, but the stuff slipped away like fine wood ash, and we went on and on. I knew Holman was in front of me. Occasionally a curse directed at Leith managed to slip out when his mouth was not filled with the smothering dust. Once I shouted at him, and he answered the cry with a groan that told me how the happening had affected him. The arch ruffian had checkmated us for the third time inside three days.

We struck the bottom at last, and, like moles, we clawed our way out of the pile of soft, feathery stuff that came streaming down upon us like a river, and for some minutes we were busy wiping the fluffy

ash from mouth and eyes and ears. It clung to us like down, and with each breath we drew it into our lungs till we coughed and sneezed from the irritation it produced. Struggling forward, knee-deep in the fine, dry powder, we reached a spot that was practically clear, and for five minutes we were busy endeavouring to relieve our tortured lungs.

"How far did we roll?" asked Holman.

"About half a mile," I replied.

"But straight, Verslun! What do you think?"

"Over a hundred yards; I'm certain of that."

"Well, I'm going to climb back."

"You can't do it!" I gasped. "That stuff is like quicksand."

"All the same I'm going to make a try."

We stumbled back to the gigantic ash pile, and shoulder to shoulder we made a rush at the immense mountain down which we had rolled. We couldn't see it, but we felt it rise around us like a flood as our legs sank deeper. It came up to our waists — to our armpits, choking and smothering us. Coming down we had rolled lightly over its surface, now our legs bored into it like rods, and we struggled vainly to move. The pile was like a high snowdrift into which we sank deeper and deeper the more we struggled, and, worn out with our efforts, we fought our way clear of the smothering ash and made an attempt to review the situation.

"He's beat us," groaned Holman. "He just trotted ahead of us till he had us on the verge of the thing, and then he side-stepped. O God! What asses we have been!"

"We did our best," I said.

"Our best?" repeated Holman. "And the man who tells you that he did his best as an excuse for failure should be shot, Verslun."

"We couldn't tell that this infernal trench was in front," I grumbled.

"Then we shouldn't have chased him like a brace of madmen. I wonder if Maru and Kaipi came near it?"

"We might call out, perhaps they'd hear."

Holman yelled the names of the two natives into the gloom above us, but his yells only started a million echoes rolling through the tremendous fissure in which we were prisoners.

"They turned back," said Holman. "They had sense enough to stay with One Eye; we hadn't."

It was no use arguing with the youngster. He denounced our stupidity till his tongue was too dry to utter the charges his half-crazed brain made against us.

To divert his thoughts I proposed that we make an attempt to explore the place, and without making any choice regarding direction we moved into the inky darkness.

"We'll take it in turns to lead," said Holman

gruffly. "Then if one of us topples over a precipice the other has a chance to save himself. I'll take first try at it, and if I find that I have pushed my foot into a hole I'll yell out a warning."

I agreed, and we moved forward slowly. The chances of ever finding our way out of that place seemed small at that moment. Leith had put us in a spot where we would not be likely to trouble him for some time, and with bitterness in our hearts we staggered along in the dark, alternately damning the treachery of the ruffian and our own stupidity. We had tried to exercise caution, but when we reviewed our actions, it seemed, as Holman had remarked, that we had used the judgment of children.

"Why didn't we wait at the door of that place till the brute came out?" he asked.

I had no answer to give to the question, and after an interval of silence he fired others at me.

"Why did you let go of One Eye? Why didn't we examine the cavern near the fire before chasing him? The girls might have been somewhere near the fire! Do you think they were?"

"I don't think so," I answered, trying to soothe him. "I think Leith was the only person at the fire. He picked Soma up just before we reached the gulf."

"But where are they? Where has the devil put them?"

"God alone knows!" I cried. "Here, it's my turn to take the lead."

In silence we went stumbling on into the appalling blackness. We could not see the dim outlines of each other when we stood only a few inches apart. The darkness of the Cavern of Skulls had been relieved by the silver skewers of moonlight, but in the night that rolled around us there was not a single gleam of light.

We had no matches. Everything that was in our pockets had been jolted out during the mad jaunt to the stone table, and now the revolver and cartridges which we had taken from One Eye had been lost by Holman during the slide down the mountain of volcanic ash that brought us to the bottom of the underground prison.

We plodded on for about an hour, then stopped simultaneously. At first I thought that the horror of the situation had affected my brain, but the fact that Holman had stopped abruptly at the same moment as I did choked back the cold fear that had rushed upon me. I was not insane! Holman was listening too! I seemed to feel that the tiny thread of sound which had set my pulses beating madly had also keyed him up to the highest tension.

After a minute of intense silence he put a question.

"Did you hear anything?"

"Did you?" I stammered.

"Are we mad, Verslun?" he asked hoarsely. "I thought ——" He stopped and moved close to me. I heard his quick breathing as he groped to find me.

"Verslun, did you hear?" he whispered, gripping my arm. "I heard her speak."

"I thought I did," I breathed. "Perhaps — perhaps it was an echo."

For a few minutes we stood, our ears searching for the sound that had disturbed us. We seemed afraid to call out — afraid to quench the little spark of hope which had suddenly flared up in the despair that filled our breasts. We knew that our ears had lied, and we tried to lengthen the thrill by remaining perfectly silent.

The sound came again, and Holman sent a wild cry into the night that hemmed us in. We were not insane! The spark of hope blazed as we rushed headlong forward. The silvery voice of Barbara Herndon had come to us again through the terrible gloom!

CHAPTER XXI

TOGETHER AGAIN

IT IS impossible to set down any statement that will enable the reader to form a mental picture of the meeting which took place in that spot of eternal night. Hands groped for hands in the darkness, and sobs and cries and words of comfort went out into the silence. Edith and Barbara Herndon wept, the Professor shrieked out denunciations of Leith, and Holman and I were nearly choked by the lumps that rose in our throats.

Explanations came in broken sentences. The Professor's anger prevented him from giving the story in detail, and the girls were not in a condi-

tion to give a lucid account of their sufferings since the night we had left them to investigate the light in the hills. We gathered from the hysterical utterances, however, that Leith had rushed them to the hills on hearing from the escaped dancer that we had dodged the fate he intended for us when he had dispatched us to the table of the centipede. The reduction in his bodyguard caused him to make immediately for the secret retreat, and as he considered it inadvisable to press his argument with the Professor and Edith at that moment, he had lowered his three prisoners into the devil chamber into which we had accidentally fallen.

"This is the place you mentioned to me the night you left the camp," said the Professor.

"We mentioned?" repeated Holman in amazement. "We didn't know the place existed till we rolled into it!"

"But you read it out of the note that Soma dropped," cried the scientist. "Don't you remember where he threatened to put the five babies?"

"The Black Kindergarten!" I stammered.

"The Black Kindergarten," said the old man. "That is what the inhuman brute called the place when he lowered us into it. We are to stay here till I sign papers that will give him possession of my property, and till — till Edith consents to marry him!"

He flung the words out into the stillness, and for a few minutes no one spoke. The horror of the situation had the same effect upon me as a blow from a sandbag. Three days before, we were in possession of Leith's letter to the one-eyed man, in which he had remarked that we would be occupants of the place of eternal night, and yet we had not been able to avert the fate which the brute had in store for us in case the Professor and Edith Herndon refused to consider his villainous proposals. The Professor's money and the girl's hand! The words made me physically sick, and I sat down upon the floor of the place till the dizziness had passed from my brain.

"And food?" Holman put the question, but the words seemed to come to me from a great distance.

"He told us he would lower it to us once a day till we — till we came to our senses," said Edith Herndon quietly. "We received our first supply some hours ago."

She tried to speak bravely, but the little catch in her voice belied the courageous front which she endeavoured to assume under cover of the darkness. Barbara was silent, except for an occasional sob which she was unable to stifle, while the Professor poured forth his story of Leith's deception when he first met him in Sydney, and where the big scoundrel had poured into the ears of the laurel-hungry

scientist the tales of skulls and ruins which he would find upon the Isle of Tears. The skulls and ruins were there, but it looked as if we would add our own skeletons to the crumbling bones of the long-dead Polynesians, the peculiarities of whose whitened brain cases were to supply the subject matter of the learned treatise that was to bring fame to the archæologist. It was an indescribably mournful reunion. We could not see each other, and when silence fell upon us I had a horrible sensation that the choking, depressing darkness of the place was wafting Edith Herndon away from me. I longed to find and clasp the hand that had taken mine the night on board *The Waif* when I made an offer of my services.

The Professor had explained that the opening through which they had been lowered was immediately above their heads. They had not moved from the spot lest they would not be able to find it again to obtain the food which Leith had promised to send till they saw fit to accede to his proposals, and when Holman suggested moving forward upon a tour of investigation the old man combated the idea vigorously.

"We will lose ourselves, and we will never be able to find our way back here to get the food," he cried.

"But we will never get out by remaining here,"

said Holman. "If he has made the acceptance of those proposals the only grounds upon which he will grant you your liberty, I don't see that it will serve any good to remain here taking the food he throws down."

"That's true," murmured Edith, and I blessed her mentally for the calm way in which she had uttered the words. The surrounding darkness had no terrors for her in comparison to the fate that awaited her above. The manner in which she spoke of the sallow-faced rogue convinced me that the proposals that had been made since the time that Leith had shone out in his true colours had produced a terror which she endeavoured to hide from her father and sister.

But the dark terrified the Professor. Although he viewed Leith's proposals with the greatest abhorrence, the hole above his head appeared to him to be the only path back to the outer world, and he was afraid to stray.

"There might be another way out of the place," said Holman. "Can Verslun and I make the attempt and leave you three here?"

"No, no!" cried Barbara. "Please stay here with us!"

"I think it will be better if we remain together," said Edith. "If you and Mr. Verslun did discover an opening it would be exceedingly difficult to find

your way back here, and if you got out of this place you might not be able to reach the opening through which we were lowered. Perhaps the way to it is known only to Leith."

Edith's argument was sound. Our finding them in that black cavern was purely an accident, and it was hardly probable that Holman and myself would be able to find our way back to the spot if we went off on a tour of investigation. Personally I had no desire to leave the girls. Leith's deviltry had so impressed me that I considered him capable of anything, and if he thought we were out of the way, I had no doubt that he would take immediate steps to break down the courage of the Professor and his daughters by means that were familiar to him. I could well understand that Edith Herndon's love for her father would compel her to sacrifice herself if she saw the aged Professor in front of the great stone centipede, and that might happen at any moment now that Leith considered that he had disposed of all active opposition.

For hours we debated the matter, and finally the Professor was won over. He agreed to move forward on an inspection tour of the vast subterranean place the moment the next supply of food came from above, and we waited anxiously. During the wait Holman and I made short trips into the darkness, but we were careful that we did not

get out of the hearing of the two girls, who called at intervals so that we would be able to find our way back. The place was awe-inspiring. Its size could only be guessed at. Stones that were flung in a certain direction where the floor sloped gradually downward could be heard rolling for many minutes after they left our hands.

We guessed that it was early morning when we heard from Leith. A blazing torch illuminated a round hole about seventy feet above our heads, and Holman and I immediately remained quiet so that the big scoundrel would be in ignorance of the reunion. There was no possibility of the torchlight making our presence known. It would take a score of torches to enable him to see us.

Leith thrust his head over the edge of the hole while Soma held the torch, and, with a coarse laugh, the ruffian inquired if his victims had changed their minds.

"No, we have not," replied the Professor, his thin, quavering voice sounding strangely weak after the deep-throated bellow of the bully on top.

"Well, you'll change it soon," cried Leith. "I'll leave you down there for another day or two, and then I'll get you up to do some stunts. Mind you, I mean a proper marriage with Miss Edith, Professor! *The Waif* will run us up to the German missionary station while you take charge here for your affectionate son-in-law."

I opened my mouth to fling an answer at the taunting scoundrel, but Holman surmised my intention and begged me to hold my tongue.

"They'll get no food if you cry out!" he whispered. "Don't speak to him, man!"

The Professor made no answer to the offensive remark, and after a few minutes' silence Leith drew back, and Soma started to lower a bundle of food into the dark prison.

"That rope might prove useful," whispered Holman. "Feel around and see if you can get hold of it before he pulls it up."

The light of the torch which Leith held only illuminated about six feet of the rope as the native passed it into the prison, so Holman and I, standing directly under the opening, felt around in the darkness as the bundle of food came toward the ground.

"I have it!" murmured Holman. "Wait till he unhooks the bundle."

We let the rope run through our hands till the package of food touched the rock floor. The line had a small hook upon the end, and the moment Soma felt that the parcel had reached the bottom of the place, he dexterously unhooked it with a slight jerk and started to haul in.

"Now!" whispered the youngster. "A big pull! We might bring the nigger through the hole!"

We went very close to performing the feat. The

jolt took the native unawares; he fell forward on his knees and barely saved himself from dropping into the opening. The rope came toward us with a run, but as we pulled furiously it stopped with a sudden jerk, and we knew that the other end was tied to some projection on the surface.

Leith laughed derisively, and the laugh maddened Holman. He clutched the rope and started to climb rapidly upward. I couldn't see him, but I felt his shoes as he wriggled away into the darkness above me, and I held my breath. I gripped the rope and kept it taut so that Leith and Soma might not discover the ruse.

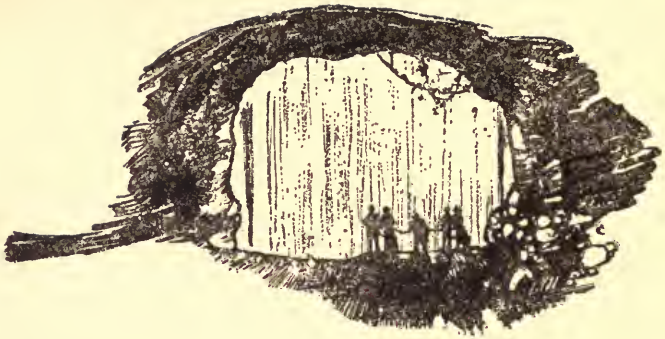
But Leith had more cunning than we credited him with. After a futile pull at the rope he thrust the pine torch through the hole, and as it dropped into the cavern it illuminated the figure of Holman, who was then about fifteen feet from the floor. "Cut the rope!" roared the ruffian. "Quick, Soma! Cut the rope and break the —— fool's neck!"

Holman, realizing that it was impossible to reach the top, saved himself a nasty fall by sliding down the rope while the native slashed at it, but he had not touched the floor when the ninety feet of strong manilla came whirling down through the darkness. And the rope was not the only gift we received. Angry at discovering that we had escaped death in our plunge into the place, Leith poured

forth a stream of blasphemy that outdid the effort he had made when kicking Holman and me on the afternoon the youngster had wounded him. He cursed us till the shocked Professor dragged his two daughters away out of hearing, and there we found the three when we had gathered up the rope and the food.

"We might as well make a try to explore the place," said Holman. "The scoundrel says that he will not send down any more food till you accept his proposals."

"Then we'll never get any," said Edith Herndon quietly. "I pray that God will show us the way out of this place."



CHAPTER XXII

THE WHITE WATERFALL

WE FOUND the rope exceedingly useful now that we had decided to explore the place in search of a way out. It was reasonable to think that the floor of the cavern would contain innumerable fissures into which we might fall, and to guard against this we decided to make a life line out of the thirty yards of manilla we had luckily obtained. Allowing about five yards of rope between each two persons, I tied it in turn around the waist of Holman, Barbara, the Professor, Edith, and myself, and being thus prepared against a precipice in our path, Holman took the lead and we followed in single file as the tightening of the rope informed each one that the immediate leader was a safe distance in front.

"Is there any choice of direction?" asked Holman, pausing after he had taken half a dozen steps.

"I don't think so," I said. "Unless some one has an intuition regarding the path to liberty."

"Please let me pick the route," murmured Edith. "I am stretching out my arm, Mr. Holman; will you come here to me and feel the direction I am pointing in?"

We clustered round the girl, each one feeling her outstretched arm and then turning quickly toward the point indicated. I was glad that no one could see my own face at that moment. It was pathetic to think of any one choosing a route in that abyss of horror, and the trouble which the girl took to make sure that Holman would move off in the direction she pointed brought tears to my eyes.

"I — I might be silly in thinking it," she stammered, "but I believe — oh, please, Mr. Holman, try and walk in the direction I pointed in!"

"I certainly will try," said the youngster. "If I go wrong, you put me right, will you? I believe somehow that we're going to find a way out. I don't know the right path to it, but I've got a premonition we'll find it. Now we're off again."

We moved forward with anxious footsteps. Imagination furrowed the floor of that place with bottomless crevices, and the cold hand of fear gripped our hearts. It required a mental effort to move one foot past the other, and whenever one of the girls stumbled, her little cry of alarm

brought untold agony to Holman and myself as we took a grip of the rope and braced ourselves against the happening which our excited minds expected any moment. We were walking hand in hand with dread — a dread that became greater when we thought that a false step of ours might drag to death the two women that we loved.

On, and on, and on, we bored into the horrible night. With blind footsteps we walked fearfully through the Stygian waves that rolled around us. The place seemed to be of enormous size, and in the dead silence that surrounded us our footsteps woke clattering echoes that appeared to mock our efforts to escape.

The air in places had a strange odour that reminded us of camphor. This peculiar smell seemed to be in certain stratas of the atmosphere through which we passed, and whenever our passage through these scented layers was unduly prolonged, we experienced a sensation that I can only liken to the near approach of seasickness. It made the girls sick and faint, but they walked on without complaining.

We struck the wall of the place after we had been walking for a period that we judged to be about three hours, and we decided to rest for a while. We sat close together upon the cold floor and endeavoured to cheer each other's spirits by constantly asserting that the air of the place made it reasonable

to suppose that there must be some other entrance besides the hole through which Leith had lowered the three, and the fissure through which Holman and I had rolled down the gigantic ash pile. And the assertions seemed logical. The two entrances that we knew of opened into Leith's retreat, and it was hard to think that the air supply of the enormous cavern in which we were wandering could come through those two openings. We combatted our fears with this argument as we ate a morsel of the food we had received that morning, and feeling that he who has the biggest stock of hope has the biggest grip upon life, we endeavoured to make light of our misfortunes as we stumbled on again after a short rest.

But that impenetrable night produced a depression that we could not shake off. Imagination sprang ahead of the moment and pictured our final struggles. We fought with the nightmares that entered our minds, and conversation languished. We couldn't speak while the mental canvases were being rapidly coloured with scenes depicting our end in the darkness and the silence, where a grim fate would even deny one a last look at a dearly loved face. A silence came upon us that had the same effect as intense cold. Each in his own frozen husk of despair plodded forward with the idea that the others were so engrossed in their own thoughts

that they were not inclined to answer when addressed. The darkness so completely isolated each person that after some hours of silence it required a tremendous effort to thoroughly convince the mind that one was walking with living people and not with phantoms.

It was after one of these intervals of silence that Barbara Herndon made a discovery that chilled our blood. She made some commonplace remark to her sister and received no reply. She repeated the observation, but it brought no comment. The happening seemed to drag the rest of us from the strange torpor, and we stopped. We sensed that Barbara Herndon was feeling her way toward her sister, and presently the younger girl gave a shriek of alarm that stirred a million echoes in that place of terror.

"Edith!" she shrieked. "Edith! Edith! Where are you?"

Holman and I clawed fiercely upon the rope, moving toward each other in an effort to find a quick solution for the mystery. We collided violently as we reached the spot where the rope had circled Edith Herndon's waist, and we stood, stunned and speechless, as we fingered the cord. In some manner, probably severed by a knifelike projection of rock, the loop which I had knotted around her body had been cut through, and the rope had fallen unnoticed from the waist of the weary girl!

"Great God!" I cried. "Where did we lose her? What way did we come?"

The questions were ridiculous. The numbing influence of the place had made us walk for an hour or so in complete silence, and it was impossible to say when she had lost her position in the line. And now, as we moved round and round, endeavouring to peer into the blackness, we lost all sense of direction. Each had a different notion about the way we had come. While we were moving forward, our combined efforts to walk straight ahead made it impossible for one to turn and go in an opposite direction, but in the few moments of our excitement as we turned and twisted in clawing for the loop where Edith had been tied, we became bewildered. We didn't know in which direction to turn in searching for the lost one!

"What'll we do?" cried the Professor. "Do something! Quick! Find her! Find her!"

I took a great breath and yelled her name into the darkness. The sound thundered through the place like the noise made by a freight train. Again and again I screamed it, and the million devils in the place shrieked the name in mockery. I exhausted myself in my mad efforts to send my voice to her ears.

Holman gripped my arm when I had worked myself into an insane frenzy, and he begged me to be quiet.

"Barbara thought she heard an answer," he cried. "Listen! There it is again!"

It was Edith! Her voice came to us like a thread of silver, and with no thought of the bottomless crevices that might be in our path, we charged blindly toward the spot from which her cry had come.

It seemed ages before we met her. The sounds puzzled us, but at last we gripped her hands, and the Professor and Barbara, hysterical with joy, sobbed their thanks into the gloom.

"I don't know how the rope became undone," cried Edith. "I didn't find out that I had become separated from the rest of you till I attempted to draw your attention to the waterfall."

"To the what?" I questioned.

"To the waterfall," repeated the girl. "Did you pass it? It is a beautiful little waterfall, and the water flows over a white limestone rock that makes it sparkle like so many fireflies in the dark."

I cannot explain what happened to me at that moment. Some veil within my mind was torn away by the few words that the girl had uttered. I was back upon Levuka wharf, lying under the copra bag where Holman had found me, and for a moment I could not speak as the subconscious mind flung a score of half-forgotten incidents into my conscious area.

"*It is the White Waterfall!*" I yelled. "It is the White Waterfall that the Maori sang of on the wharf at Levuka! He was warning Toni, and Toni was killed by Soma because he knew! It is the way out! We're saved! We're saved! It is on the road to heaven out of Black Fernando's hell!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WIZARDS' SEAT

AS WE stumbled toward the spot from which came the sounds of running water, the incidents of the preceding ten days seemed to be dropping into their places within my brain like the pieces of a picture puzzle that has suddenly become plain to the eye of the child who is putting it together. I understood! My brain seemed bursting within my skull. It appeared to me that God, in his own way, had made me a blind instrument to do his work. The big Maori on the wharf at Levuka knew of the hell upon the Isle of Tears. The Maori had warned Toni, the little Fijian, but fear of what might happen to any one possessing the knowledge

had made Toni deny that he was the companion of the Maori when he was questioned before and after he had reached *The Waif*. In a burst of confidence he had confessed the truth to me on the afternoon after I had saved him from being washed overboard, but the confession had been made in the presence of Soma, and, as Kaipi asserted, it had cost Toni his life. Leith, alias Black Fernando, had ordered the big Kanaka to put the possessor of such important information out of the way.

I repeated over and over again the words which the Maori had addressed to his woolly headed pupil on that hot day at Levuka. They raced madly round in my mind, as if exultant because I had found the reason why they persisted in storing themselves in the cells of my brain. The soul within me had known that the knowledge would be wanted!

"How many paces?" asked the Professor.

"Sixty!" I roared; and then, seized with temporary insanity, I chanted the song of the Maori at the top of my voice:

"Sixty paces to the left,
Sixty paces to the left,
That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven,
That's the way to heaven out
Of Black Fernando's hell."

"And here's the waterfall!" cried Holman. "Go easy now! It must be flowing into some hole, and

we don't want to fall into an abyss just as Verslun has discovered the way out."

We advanced cautiously toward the spot where, as Edith had said, the water sparkled like fireflies in the darkness. It was an eerie place. We knew that the water was there by the sound it made flowing over the rocks, but, except for the tiny sparks of phosphorescent light that seemed to fly out from it, we could not see it. The spectacle thrilled us. A million sparks of light seemed to rise from the bed of feldspar over which the water leaped, and the peculiar quality of the rock gave to it the weird brilliancy which held us spellbound as we advanced with extreme caution. It wasn't white by any means, but in those inky depths it would not require a great effort of the imagination to call it white. The faint luminous flashes were the only particles of light that we had seen since Leith had thrown the half-extinguished torch into the hole that morning, and we could hardly turn our eyes from the novelty.

The water fell into an opening in the rocky floor, and gurgled away into depths that made us shiver as the distant tinkle came up to us as we crept forward on hands and knees. We were all thirsty at that moment, but we wished to put the directions of the Maori to an immediate test, and we were satisfied to let our longing for a cool drink stay with us till we could prove whether the strangely luminous

waterfall before us was the one about which the two natives chanted the strange song.

"They said to the left, didn't they?" asked Holman.

"Yes," I answered. I hardly recognized my own voice as I jerked out the word. I couldn't see the faces of the girls, but I understood what skyscrapers of hope they had built upon the announcement I had made when Edith had told of her discovery. Now, as we moved around the hole in the floor, I understood what a tremendous shock it would be to them if we discovered that there was no connection between the falling water and the chant.

"I suppose the left side will be the one upon our left hand when facing the fall?" said Holman.

"I suppose so," I stammered. "Let us move up close to the side of the water."

We edged along till we could touch the flashing stream that dropped from some point high up in the immense roof of the place, and then we started to step the distance, the Professor chattering along behind us, while the two girls brought up the rear.

Holman chanted the numbers aloud, and a cold sweat broke out upon me as he counted. A fear of my own sanity came upon me. I thought that this connection between the song and the luminous water might have been suggested by a brain that had sud-

denly lost its balance under the torture of the preceding three days.

"Fifty-six! Fifty-seven! Fifty-eight! ——"

It was Holman's voice, but to my reeling brain the sound came from the roof and thundered in my ears like a brazen bell.

"Fifty-nine! *Sixty!*"

We stopped together, and the suppressed sobs of Barbara Herndon were the only sounds that broke the little stillness that followed. There was no way out! The darkness, so it seemed to us, was thicker than ever!

"Nothing doing," muttered Holman. "I counted right, didn't I?"

"I think so," I answered huskily.

"Sixty paces exactly, and here's the wall alongside us."

My fingers groped along the moist rock. I felt stunned. Now that the test had been made it seemed insanity to connect a chant that I heard at Levuka with a waterfall in a cavern on the Isle of Tears. But why had Toni been killed? Why had Leith exhibited such curiosity about the song when he heard me relating the incident to the two sisters on board the yacht?

My fingers came to a crevice in the wall as the question presented a bold front to the doubt that had gripped me. The fissure was some four

feet wide, and my exclamation made Holman put a question.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing," I answered. Wrecked hopes had made me cautious. Still I felt certain that I had remembered those words for some purpose. I recalled how they had puzzled me on that hot day, and how I had questioned Holman concerning "Pilgrim's Progress" when he had roused me from my sleep.

"Well, if there's nothing here I'm going back to get a drink," said Holman.

"Hold on!" I stammered, as I uncoiled the piece of spare rope from my shoulders; "I want you a minute. There's a split in this rock, and I'm going to explore it. Take the end of this rope and hang on."

"Hadn't I better go with you?" he asked.

"Not this trip," I answered. "I've just got a feeling that I'd like to see where it leads to. Hold tight!"

I stepped cautiously into the narrow passage and immediately found that it narrowed to such an extent that I had to turn sideways to squeeze through. The floor sloped upward, and as the rock was damp and slippery, I dropped upon my knees so that I could climb more rapidly. The place seemed a narrow chute. My knees were skinned from the rough bottom, but I scratched desperately to obtain a footing. Hope was still alive. The Maori had said that

the road to heaven was sixty paces from the White Waterfall, and if an all-seeing Providence had guided Edith to the waterfall, it was surely decreed that we would make our escape from the clutches of the devil who had us at his mercy.

"We will surely escape," I muttered, as I scratched and clawed in an effort to drag myself up the slippery path. "We will escape! I know it! We will escape! I know ——"

The muttered words died upon my lips. The crevice turned and then broadened suddenly, and a blinding flash of light forced me to fling myself face downward upon the rock. For a moment I lay there, wondering stupidly whether something had happened to my eyes or whether I had come suddenly into the light of day. I had seen light — the light of what?

Slowly I lifted my head, and the truth came to me with stunning force. It was God's own sunlight that I had seen! The chute ended within three paces of the spot where I lay, and immediately opposite the opening through which I looked was a patch of vermilion rock that blazed gloriously as the rays of the afternoon sun struck full upon it. I knew that rock! It had thrilled me as I looked at it on the afternoon when Leith had introduced us to the greatest natural wonder of the Pacific. I was at the end of a passage that opened into the Vermilion Pit!

From where I lay I could not see the top of the crater. When the passage had suddenly broadened, the roof came down upon it, so that the opening through which I looked at the opposite side of the great pit was about ten feet wide but not more than two feet in height. An overhanging lip of rock prevented me from looking up, but I understood that I was lower than the slippery Ledge of Death that we had crossed to reach the Valley of Echoes. It seemed years since we had crossed that path, yet it was less than a week.

I thought of the others waiting in the darkness, and I turned and slid down the chute up which I had scrambled. The path to liberty was not yet plain, but there was fresh air and sunlight at the top of the chute, and one could see the faces of those they loved. Bumping and bounding over the jagged rocks I went at a terrific speed to the bottom of the slide, and, scrambling through the opening, I shouted the news to the four who waited there.

"It opens into the Vermilion Pit!" I gasped. "I can't see how we can climb out, but there's hope — there's hope!"

I was foolish in making the last statement, but the sight of the glorious sunbeams, striking down into the abyss, had made me blind to the difficulties that were yet to be faced! And the Maori's chant must surely be true! Now that it had brought us to the

light, I could not but believe that it would bring us to liberty.

The slippery chute brought a suggestion from Holman. He advised that the two girls and the Professor remain at the bottom while he and I took one end of the rope to the top so that we could haul them up the wet track that I had scaled with difficulty.

"We won't be five minutes!" I cried. "Stay where you are till we signal."

I didn't think, as Holman and I crawled to the top of that place, what an eventful five minutes that would be. But the big things of life are crammed into minutes, and Time was bringing the most thrilling one of our lives toward us as we scrambled up the chute. Our adventures upon the Isle of Tears were to have a climax that fitted them.

Holman stopped as I had done and thrust his face down upon the rock as his eyes caught a glimpse of the glittering wall of the crater that came suddenly into view. The rays of the sun blazing down upon the stained sides of the mysterious pit made the veins of colour appear like brilliant snakes. The patch that was framed by the walls of the opening through which we gazed was a wild riot of scintillating, blinding colours that dazzled our eyes as we stared at them.

For a minute Holman breathed hungrily of the

hot air, then he attempted to discover our exact position in the crater.

"We must be somewhere near the top," he declared. "Don't you remember that the colour of the walls darkened rapidly below the Ledge of Death?"

"I remember," I answered. "We must be nearly on a level with the Ledge."

"If we could look out from under this projecting piece of rock," muttered the youngster.

"It's risky."

"I'll make a try, Verslun. Hold my legs. I'm going to hang out of this burrow and take a peep around to get our bearings."

I gripped his legs, and turning upon his back he pushed himself slowly out over the edge of the passage till he was able to look up in front of the piece of rock that projected like the peak of a cap above the opening.

Clinging to this peak with his two hands, the upper part of his body being out over the abyss, he stared upward, and as I watched his face I noticed the look of joy and amazement that spread across it.

"What is it, Holman?" I cried. "Are we saved? Tell me!"

He slid hurriedly back to safety and pounded the rock above his head with his bare fists.

"Do you know what this is?" he yelled. "Do you know?"

I tried to utter the words that came to my tongue, but I could not. I could see the joy in the youngster's eyes, but I was afraid to speak.

"It is the Ledge of Death!" he shouted. "There is only six inches of rock above us!"

"Then we're saved!" I cried.

"Sure! If you put the rope around me I can crawl up on it, and once there I can haul up the others. Do you know what Soma told the Professor about the bad men falling into this infernal pit?"

I nodded my head. I was unable to speak at that moment.

"Well, the Wizards of the Centipede fixed that! Don't you see? This was their seat! They leaned out of this place as I leaned out just now, and they gripped the ankles of any poor devil they had a grouch against. It was devilish ——"

I put my hand across his mouth and he became instantly mute. We held our breath and listened intently. From above us came the faint sound of footsteps and a cold perspiration broke out upon us. Some one was walking slowly along the Ledge of Death!

The sounds ceased when the unknown was immediately above our heads, and a guilty look came upon Holman's face. The man on the Ledge had

probably heard the youngster's voice, and he was puzzled to know where the sounds had come from.

We sat without moving a muscle. The silence convinced us that the unknown was listening. We knew that he hadn't climbed from the Ledge to the top of the crater. The scratching of his shoes against the rock would have come to our ears. He was waiting — waiting to discover from what direction the voice had come that caused him to pause and listen.

The minutes passed like slow-dragging years. The man above wore shoes and the two men who wore shoes, outside our own party, were Leith and the one-eyed man. Somehow we felt that Maru and Kaipi had settled with One Eye, so there was only one person on the Isle of Tears who could possibly be listening.

Ten minutes passed, then Holman pointed to his own legs. I understood the sign and gripped his ankles. My head was bursting with the terror inspired by the thought that our escape might be cut off after the miraculous manner in which the way out had been shown to us.

Without noise, yet with incredible swiftness, the youngster turned upon his back and wriggled forward till his head and shoulders were again out over the pit. His body was tense, every muscle showing as he stiffened himself. Into my mind flashed a picture

of the bloodthirsty Wizards of the Centipede stretching out in exactly the same manner centuries before a white man sailed into the Pacific!

The silence seemed to sap my strength. I watched Holman with eyes that were half-blinded by the perspiration that rolled down my forehead. There was no movement upon the ledge, and the fingers of the youngster were reaching slowly—slowly upward.

It was a yell of horror that shattered the awful quiet — a yell that went up through the hot air like the shriek of a lost soul. It swirled around and around like a lariat of brass. It was a terrible yell. It wrenched my inmost being till the very spirit seemed to go out of me for an instant, and I returned to consciousness to find myself struggling to hold Holman from being dragged into the depths below.

It was the youngster's voice that seemed to bring me back to a knowledge of the surroundings. In an instant's pause in the torrent of blasphemy his words came to me clear and distinct.

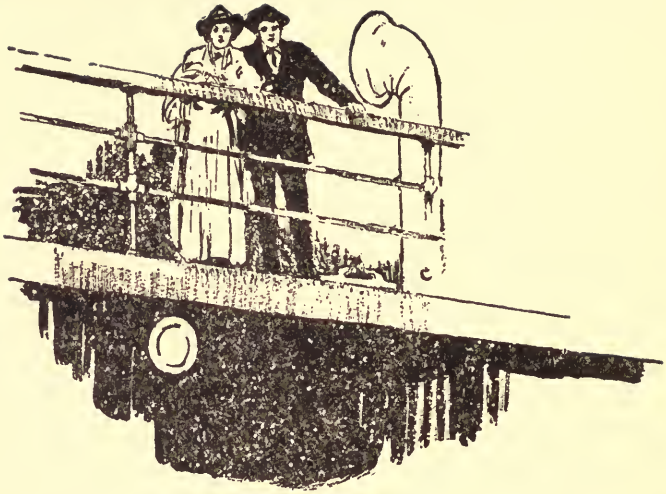
"Hold me tight, Verslun!" he cried. "Hold me tight, man! *I have him!*"

I shut my eyes to escape the fascination of the depths, and I gripped Holman's ankles till my nails burrowed into his flesh. I felt his body heave with a tremendous effort, then another yell, shorter but more terrifying than the first, told me that the struggle was over.

I dragged Holman back to safety, and, stretched side by side upon the rock, we listened. Down in the pit — miles, leagues away, something was falling!

The youngster pulled himself together after the silence had settled upon the place like a film.

"Let's tie the rope and get the girls up here," he said quietly. "In a while — in a little while—I can crawl on to the ledge and pull them up with a rope."



CHAPTER XXIV

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

WITH quick-beating pulses we fixed the rope and shouted directions down the slippery passage to the girls and the Professor, and inside of ten minutes they were beside us, looking out with frightened eyes at the coloured wall of the opposite side of the pit. The faces of Edith and Barbara looked pale and careworn, but they smiled bravely when Holman assured them that we were within a yard of the path by which we had crossed to the Valley of Echoes.

"Be brave," he said cheerfully. "You'll be on

your way back to the shore before many hours have passed by. There is no — no danger now."

I do not know if the two girls understood the meaning of his words, but they asked no questions. Somehow I think that they knew what had happened. Those two terrible cries must have reached their ears as they waited at the foot of the chute that led to the wizards' seat, but if they had any doubts concerning their origin, they refrained from seeking information. But the Professor knew. A melancholy that had tied his tongue all through the long day in the Black Kindergarten left him as he came to the sunlight, and he became light-hearted and merry. He felt that he had been relieved of his load of nightmares, and the dangers of the climb to the rocky shelf above our heads did not trouble him in the least.

It was Holman who performed the heroic work on the late afternoon of that eventful day. With the rope tied around his waist, he pushed himself out as he had done twice before during the preceding hour, then, gripping the edge of the shelf, dragged himself forward. For a moment, as he swung over the depths, it looked as if he would be unable to drag himself up, and we clung on to the rope and watched him with frightened eyes. But youth and courage won the day. Slowly, inch by inch, he lifted himself, the lips of the two girls moving in dumb

prayer; then we lost sight of him as he drew his legs up on to the ledge, and we knew that we were safe!

The youngster secured the rope to a projection on the shelf above, and the Professor, nervous but game, was the next to make the perilous journey. It was blood-curdling to watch the old man swaying over the depths while Holman, lying flat upon his stomach, gripped him beneath the arms and dragged the poor old scientist to safety.

Barbara went next, and when the rope was lowered once more I secured it around Edith's waist. I held her in my arms as I pushed her body forward to Holman's strong hands that waited just below the ledge, and for one brief instant her lips came close to mine, and with a mad, wild love that had been born in danger, where there was no time for words, I stooped and kissed her. And even in that moment of extreme peril a faint smile swept over her face as she looked up into mine, and I knew that she understood.

It was nearly sunset when we moved away from the top of the Vermilion Pit, but we had not gone ten paces when we stopped. A yell came out of the place, then another and another, and Holman and I rushed back to the edge. Down beneath us, on the slippery Ledge of Death, two natives were locked in a death grip, and a single glance told us that they were Maru and Soma. The Raretongan

had chased Leith's brown lieutenant on to the path, and now they were struggling like demons in the mad endeavour to thrust each other into the depths.

"Quick!" cried Holman. "The rope!"

He slipped the line around his waist as the pair moved to the edge. Maru was dragging the big savage with a strength that was surprising, but it was a certainty that if Soma went over the edge the Raretongan would keep him company.

Holman slipped down upon the Ledge, but before he could reach them a dusty, bleeding figure stumbled through the entrance to the cavern, a knife flashed in the sunlight, and Maru was drawn back into safety as Soma released his grip. The newcomer was Kaipi!

"He kill Toni!" he cried. "Toni all same brother to me. Toni work with me long time Suva."

Toni, the pupil of the Maori, who had instructed him on Levuka wharf as to the way out of Black Fernando's hell, had been avenged at last.

It was a happy reunion we held upon the edge of the pit. Edith and Barbara bound up the wounds of the two faithful natives, and the muscular Raretongan was so touched with their tender ministrations that he foraged in his tattered sulu, and with tears of gratitude in his big brown eyes he handed back to Barbara the emerald ring with which she had caused him to desert from Leith's service.

"Me want no pay from you!" he cried. "Me work for you all same nothing!"

We learned that the one-eyed white man and the last of the Wizards of the Centipede had been dispatched by Maru and Kaipi, and we also received the news that the four carriers had bolted back to the yacht. The latter piece of information somewhat dampened our spirits. We felt that Leith and Newmarch were friends, and we wondered what the silent, thin-faced captain would do when he heard the story of Black Fernando's discomfiture.

On account of Kaipi's weak state we camped that evening on the same spot that we had occupied on the second night upon the Isle of Tears, and at daybreak next morning we set out for the little bay. We were all happy. The Professor was as pleased as a boy on his vacation, and he had returned again to his task of taking notes. The two girls were radiant; Kaipi was joyful because the murdered Toni had been revenged, and Maru was in the seventh heaven of delight because Barbara had informed him that he could go to San Francisco with the party as a reward for his devotion. As for Holman and myself, we forgot the loneliness of the place in our joy. The same trees peered at us, the same cablelike vines gripped our legs, and the same weird rock masses blocked our paths, but love was in our hearts, and morbid thoughts were chased away.

On the afternoon of the second day from the pit we reached the shore of the little bay, but *The Waif* was not there. Newmarch had evidently discovered that Leith had not been quite successful in the carrying out of his plans, and fearful of his own share in the business, he had bolted with the yacht. The South Sea breeds piratical thoughts, and from our own knowledge of the captain we guessed that in his particular case those thoughts would be easily generated.

"He thinks he'll save his own skin by clearing out," said Holman, "but I'm satisfied that Dame Justice is an expert with the lariat. If he's not in jail before three months are out, my name is not Will Holman."

It was the missionary schooner *Messenger of Light* that saw our beacon upon the island on the fourth day after we had reached the spot where we had landed from *The Waif*. The beautiful white vessel hove to outside the entrance to the little bay, a boat came ashore, and twenty minutes after they had first sighted our signal we were on the way to Wellington, New Zealand.

"And the 'Frisco boats call there," murmured Barbara. "Joy! Joy! Joy!"

The moon was whitening the sleeping Pacific when Edith and I stood looking over the taffrail as the

Messenger of Light swept on her course. From nearby came the voice of Professor Herndon relating his experiences to a missionary who was returning from the Marquesas. A soft island melody was wafted from the fo'c'stle, and the night was alive with all the witchery of the tropics.

"Edith," I whispered, as I took her hand, "I am a common sailorman, but if you could love me I — I ——"

I stopped in confusion, and as she had done on a former occasion, she came to the rescue of my stammering tongue.

"You are a big, true man," she murmured. "If you had not come with us we should not have returned from that awful place. God let you listen to that song of the White Waterfall so that we might be saved."

Some minutes afterward she released herself from my arms. "Let us find Will and Barbara," she said softly. "We will share each other's happiness."

And as I followed her across the poop, a tremendous surge of joy rose up and filled my heart. The whole world was clean and good, and in my glorious exultation I whispered a prayer for the soul of John Leith, alias Black Fernando.

THE END

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